

READER

Blood, ink, and tears

Tattooing is still dominated by white men, but women, nonbinary people, and people of color are making their mark.

By Meggie Gates **10**

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CITY LIFE



New York City's new 14th Street Busway has improved bus travel times up to 47 percent.
© MARC A. HERMANN / MTA NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT

TRANSPORTATION

The Manhattan project

NYC sped up buses by limiting cars' access. Let's do that in Chicago.

By JOHN GREENFIELD

When it comes to providing fast, reliable trips, the current state of CTA bus routes is a civic embarrassment. As of late 2017, Chicago had a mere 4.1 miles of dedicated bus lanes, compared with 27 miles in San Francisco, 35.4 miles in Los Angeles, and a whopping 82.8 miles in New York City, according to the Active Transportation Alliance's "Back on the Bus" report on speeding up service. We've only added a handful of blocks of new bus-only lanes since then.

Part of the problem has been reluctance from Chicago leaders to take away street space from drivers to make room for more sustainable and space-efficient modes for fear of a political backlash. In 2013 under Rahm Emanuel, the city floated a bold proposal for a bus rapid transit system on Ashland between 95th and Irving Park, with dedicated lanes, stations in the middle of the street, and time-saving features like prepaid, multi-door boarding, which would have nearly doubled bus speeds. But in the face of organized Not In My Back Yard-style opposition from some residents and merchants who balked at the idea of giving two of the four existing travel lanes to buses and banning most left turns from Ashland, the plan was indefinitely shelved.

On the other hand, the downtown Loop

Link express bus corridor, launched in December 2015, was a relatively gutsy move. That involved converting multiple travel lanes on streets like Washington and Madison to bus-only lanes, "island" bus stops, and protected bike lanes. From a livable streets standpoint, the project was a success, proving that taking large amounts of downtown street space away from drivers to make sustainable transportation safer and more pleasant doesn't create carnage.

But in terms of speeding up buses, the \$41 million Loop Link project was more show than go. While it included raised boarding platforms with giant, architecturally interesting shelters, the CTA never implemented prepaid boarding, which means buses waste time while customers wait in line to swipe their Ventra cards onboard or pay in cash. And there's little enforcement of the red lanes, so private vehicles often clog them. As a result, the initiative has had only a modest impact on bus speeds.

Meanwhile, New York has built miles of Select express bus routes all over the city. While they're not as visually impressive as Loop Link, they're a lot more effective. Customers buy tickets from machines at the stops before the buses arrive, and they can board at any of the three doors on the extra-long buses (ran-

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CITY LIFE

dom ticket checks by inspectors discourage fare evasion), so there's little "dwell time" at the stops. On top of that, the curbside bus-only lanes are camera enforced, so people don't drive or park in them.

Fortunately, Mayor Lori Lightfoot stated in her transportation platform, "I want Chicago to have a world-class bus system . . . People will seek out other transportation options if bus service is inconvenient." She vowed to create 50 miles of bus lanes, revisit the Ashland bus rapid transit (BRT) plan, and get legislation passed in Springfield to legalize fair camera enforcement of bus lanes.

Under Lightfoot's \$20 million Bus Priority Zone program, partially funded by the new ride-hail tax that kicked in on January 6, the city has taken some tentative steps toward expanding the busway network. Short stretches of rush-hour-only bus lanes were recently installed near el stations on 79th, Chicago Avenue, and Western, along with new overhead signs and "queue jump signals" that allow buses to move through an intersection ahead of regular traffic. Thankfully, the city recently deployed traffic aides to write tickets to scofflaws who park in the new red lanes while grabbing lattes from Starbucks. Other streets under consideration for these kinds of improvements include 63rd, Belmont, Pulas-ki, and Halsted.

But it's time for Chicago to go bolder and follow the latest inspiring example from New York. (Hey, I don't mind us being the Second City in this regard if it means I don't get stuck in traffic on the 22 Clark bus.) Launched in October, NYC's 14th Street Busway, a nearly car-free corridor traversing Lower Manhattan, has been a roaring success.

From 6 AM to 10 PM daily, through traffic on 14th is limited to M14 Select buses and trucks making deliveries on the street, plus emergency and paratransit vehicles. Private car drivers, cabbies, and ride-hail drivers can make pickups or drop-offs along the stretch, as long as they make the next available right turn to exit the street. The city is currently putting in curbside bulb-outs (raised platforms for passengers) at intersections so that the buses don't have to maneuver in and out of (minimal) traffic to make stops, further speeding operations.

As with Chicago's Ashland BRT plan, there was NIMBY opposition to the 14th Street Busway—a lawsuit on behalf of disgruntled neighbors delayed the launch by a few months. But the proof is in the pudding. A new study by Sam Schwartz Engineering

found that bus travel times on 14th improved by 22 to 47 percent in recent months. The time savings for straphangers are as much as 9.7 minutes from one end of the corridor to the other, traveling east. Ridership on the M14 has increased by 24 percent during the week and 30 percent on weekends. And, contrary to the doomsday predictions of opponents, the traffic impacts on nearby streets have been minimal.

So how about rolling out a similar initiative in Chicago? The transit authority's statement in response to this potentially controversial idea was anodyne: "CTA will continue to monitor the bus-priority street project in Manhattan, as well as bus projects in other cities, to see if [the strategies] can be used to enhance CTA service."

But transit advocates and experts say they're jazzed about the concept. "Let's face it, with our city and state's financial problems, we can only expect so much in terms of new rail [lines]," said DePaul transportation professor Joe Schwieterman. "The results from New York are impressive and encouraging, showing that that busway projects can produce a fairly dramatic ridership boost at relatively modest cost."

Metropolitan Planning Council transportation director Audrey Wennink agreed that we should follow New York's example. "This is the direction world-class cities are heading: making streets work better for high-capacity transit, to reduce traffic deaths, and improve air quality." In addition to the aforementioned streets where Chicago is currently eyeing bus improvements, she named Michigan, Fullerton, and Lake Shore Drive as high-ridership roadways where car drivers currently slow down transit commuters, so bus lanes would be beneficial.

University of Illinois at Chicago transportation expert P.S. Sriraj said he's also interested in piloting a 14th Street-style Busway in Chicago, citing Division, Harlem, and Ogden as other possible candidates. "The challenge for getting this off the ground is to have a champion on the political front." He noted that if there is vocal support for the project from the mayor and the CTA president, which wasn't really the case with the Ashland BRT proposal, it will have more credibility to overcome NIMBY opposition.

Schwieterman agreed. "Creating more busways will require a fair amount of salesmanship to convince a skeptical public." ■

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FOOD FEATURE

Getting Lay'd

Lessons in potato chip diplomacy

By MIKE SULA

It's 2020, and weed is legal, the world is ending, and there's nothing else to do but eat potato chips. We at the *Reader* have a long tradition of feeding the trolls of the Frito-Lay company, particularly when it comes to things like cappuccino chips.

But the worldview of Lay's is broad, inclusive, and bigger than the snack aisle at Park to Shop in Bridgeport, which is huge. The selection of Lay's is dazzling and confounding. Not long ago I swept up a dozen varieties of Lay's, formulated from a chemistry set of flavoring agents (disodium inosinate, L-alanine, sugar) to appeal to the Chinese palate.

They sat in a pile until I picked up a dozen more Thai flavors at Talard Thai Asian Market a few weeks later. I'm not in the habit of playing favorites but the results were pretty clear to the distinguished panel of tasters I assembled, who—with the exception of one miscreant who claimed to love every flavor

he shoved into his gob—preferred the Thai flavors to the Chinese.

In general the Chinese chips suffered from an overabundance of sugar (or aspartame) and a discombobulating lack of salt. The Thai crisps are more of a mystery, with vague and relatively little information in their listed ingredients. Maybe that lends to their appeal, but they are definitely more complex and closer to what they're billed as.

What follows is a summary of the ones we liked—and a few we didn't. You can read about all 18 flavors we tried on the *Reader's* website. Evaluators are identified by their code names, based on their admitted eating habits and preferences:

JFW, aka Jaded Food Writer
BMP, aka Bland Midwestern Palate
LLE, aka Learned to Like Eggs
LSC, aka Loves a Shrimp Chip
SDP, aka Shameless Dog Palate

Chip: Wasabi

Origin: China

Key ingredients: Mislabeled with cucumber ingredients

Tasting notes:

JFW: It doesn't have the sinus-scouring signature of wasabi, or even horseradish. There's more sugar than salt.

BMP: It's not very hot—just a hint of wasabi.

LLE: It doesn't fulfill its promise.

The chip rejects were collected in a bowl that is now a Superfund site. 📍 MIKE SULA

LSC: I'd eat that in an airport.

Consensus: No

Chip: Texas Grilled BBQ

Origin: China

Key ingredients: Mislabeled with cucumber ingredients

Tasting notes:

JFW: There's a picture of a rare New York Strip on the bag so before you even open it there's a fundamental disconnect about what Texas barbecue is.

LSC: In China it's salted cardboard.

Consensus: No

Chip: Italian Red Meat Flavor

Origin: China

Key ingredients: Artificial Red Meat Flavor, Edible Chili Flavor Essence

Tasting notes:

JFW: Judging by the bag, Italian Red Meat Flavor is Mandarin for Bolognese.

LSC: This is what I imagine the bottom of a can of tomato sauce would taste like.

BMP: None of these are salty enough. A Lay's is salty as a motherfucker. This would be better with more salt.

Consensus: No

Chip: Hot Chili Squid

Origin: Thailand

Key ingredients: Milk, squid

Tasting notes:

LLE: Smells like a pile of seafood.

LSC: Still on the sweet side, but I'd definitely eat this bag.

LLE: It tastes like how I'd imagine those words would taste: some deep-fried squid with dipping sauce.

Consensus: Yes

Chip: Grilled Eel

Origin: China

Key ingredients: fish, shrimp, soy, dairy

Tasting notes:

LSC: This smells like—SNIFFS—smells like your sweaty running socks after two days.

JFW: I like it already.

LSC: It tastes like super old ginger. Ohhhh! Grocery store sushi!

LLE: A step up from gas station sushi.

Consensus: No

Chip: Salted Egg

Origin: Thailand

Key ingredients: ribotides

Tasting notes:

JFW: I was told this sells out at Talard as soon as they get it.

LLE: That might be the saltiest one we've had.

BMP: They have a hot moment at the end, which I appreciate.

Consensus: Yes

Chip: Yogurt

Origin: China

Key ingredients: Mislabeled cucumber

Tasting notes:

BMP: It's sweet again, like a creamsicle.

LSC: This might work paired with the cucumber.

LLE: Am I crazy to say dulce de leche?

Consensus: Tie

Chip: Numb & Spicy Hot Pot

Origin: China

Key ingredients: sesame, Sichuan pepper, fennel Disodium-5' ribonucleotide

Tasting notes:

BMP: I'm gonna need another Coors Light.

LSC: Hardcore Italian seasoning. I don't know if it's numbing or hot but I am pro that one. It tastes nothing like it's supposed to taste like. Like margherita pizza.

LLE: Almost a bruschetta with a shit-ton of basil on it.

Consensus: Yes.

Chip: Green Curry

Origin: Thailand

Key ingredients: packaging gas

Tasting notes:

JFW: This tastes like exactly what it says it is.

BMP: It tastes like grass.

Consensus: Yes.

Chip: Miengkam Krobos (aka one-bite salad)

Origin: Thailand

Key ingredients: shrimp, soybeans

Tasting notes:

SDP: It tastes like Crunchberries . . .

BMP: . . . with lime

Consensus: Yes

Chip: Shrimp Tom Yum

Origin: Thailand

Key ingredients: fish, shrimp

Tasting notes:

LSC: Nailed it

Consensus: Yes. 🍻

🐦 @MikeSula

NEWS & POLITICS

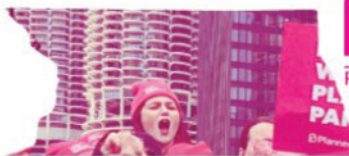
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POLITICS

Sensei Barnett

He fought the machine and taught a rookie reporter about Chicago politics.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

In the days after he died on December 28, 2019, Richard Barnett's obituaries told stories of the roles he'd played in Chicago politics over the last 50 years—as an activist, strategist, and ally to several legends, Mayor Harold Washington included.

To that I'd like to add one more role—teacher, with a specialty in helping young and naive rookie reporters learn a thing or two about Chicago politics.

Oh, he was an excellent teacher for guys like that. I should know—I was one of his students.

We met soon after I moved to Chicago in 1981. I was writing a story about Black aldermen, and someone—I can't remember who—

recommended I call Barnett.

From then on, it seemed as though an election never passed without me taking a master course in Chicago politics from the legendary Mr. Barnett.

He seemed to know everyone and everything, about not just Black west- and south-side politics, but also independent politics on the north side and in Hyde Park.

We shared a love for talking—we'd talk for hours, usually by phone. He spoke in a soothing monotone—exceedingly exact and patient, with a remarkable attention to details and a habit of going on tangents. A habit, alas, that I share.

Over time, he told me his story. Born in 1931

NEWS & POLITICS

Richard Barnett helped Harold Washington get elected mayor in 1983.  COURTESY BARNETT FAMILY

on the south side. “One of 14 kids—we were poor as church mice.”

In 1953, he and his wife moved to North Lawndale on the west side. Back then, it was a mostly white community—he bought his home from a Jewish family that moved to the suburbs.

But you know what they say about integration in Chicago—it lasts about as long as the first Black family moves in and the last white family moves out. In the case of Barnett’s corner of North Lawndale, that was no more than a few years.

Barnett worked as a clerk for the post office. In a roundabout way, organizing a youth baseball league got him involved in politics.

“We believed that if we could catch youngsters before they reached gang age and get them involved in something, we could keep them out of trouble,” he once told me. “I talked to a lot of people all over Lawndale, and soon we had [32] teams. They were there to play baseball, but I tried to teach them other things, too—like race pride, community pride, respect for education, respect for property, and mainly respect for self. If you teach a kid to respect himself, you’d eliminate a lot of your problems.”

He was hoping to convert a vacant lot behind a local factory into a North Lawndale version of Field of Dreams: “We could have had four baseball diamonds on that land, except there was a slight hill. So, we went to the politicians. All we wanted them to do was have the land graded—just have it leveled. They told us it would cost \$5,000 to \$6,000. And the city didn’t have the money.”

At the same time, the city was installing “all new curbs on sections of Michigan Avenue because the queen of England was coming to visit. That cost the city about \$18,000. They didn’t have \$5,000 for the kids, but they had \$18,000 for the queen of England.”

It’s an old story in Chicago. There’s always money for something no one really needs. But try to help some kids on the west side play baseball? And, suddenly, we’re broke.

“That made me madder than a six-shooter. To me, the politicians had their priorities wrong. That’s when I became involved in politics.”

Looking to change the world—or at least his piece of it—Barnett joined the aldermanic campaign of Arthur Hamilton, a young lawyer running as an independent in the 24th ward

special election of 1958. Hamilton was up against Ben Lewis, Mayor Richard J. Daley’s handpicked candidate.

It was a tough campaign. According to Barnett, the Lewis camp tore down signs, roughed up volunteers, harassed voters, intimidated election judges, and stole votes.

Ben Lewis won. But the story doesn’t end there.

Arthur Hamilton went on to have a distinguished career as a judge—he died in 2010.

As for Lewis? In 1963, police found him shot dead in his ward office on Roosevelt Road. He’d been handcuffed to his desk—cigarette burns on his arm—with three bullets to the back of his head.

Clearly, Lewis had done something to get someone very upset. Was it the mob, rival politicians—or both? Back then those two categories were hardly mutually exclusive on the west side. No one was ever arrested for his murder, and the killing of Alderman Ben Lewis remains one of Chicago’s most enduring mysteries.

Over the years Barnett played a role in many great political triumphs. He helped unseat Edward Hanrahan, the notorious state’s attorney who supervised the police raid that killed Black Panther leaders Fred Hampton and Mark Clark.

Barnett helped Congressman Ralph Metcalfe win reelection, overcoming opposition from the elder Mayor Daley, who had tried to punish Metcalfe for speaking out against police brutality.

And, of course, he helped Harold Washington win election in 1983 as Chicago’s first Black mayor.

But more often than not, Barnett was on the losing side of an election—as in the Hamilton/Lewis aldermanic campaign.

That’s how it goes when you’re running against the machine. You can’t cry too much over a loss—as soon as one fight’s over, another’s starting up. Another lesson I learned from Richard Barnett.

Over the years, I’ve ranted and railed against the political miscreants in Chicago—the bully mayors, the cowardly aldermen, the sheeplike voters.

But there are also a lot of good people in this city like Richard Barnett. He was tough enough to fight the machine but nice enough to teach a rookie reporter what’s really going on in Chicago. 

 @joravben

POETRY CORNER

Diversity, A Banned Word Love Poem

By Debra Bruce

In 2017, the Trump administration ordered the CDC to stop using seven words & phrases, including “diversity,” in its official documents.

He was too old to be scooped up in a towel
after a bath, but I could still
hug him getting home from school,
lean down behind him, smell his hair,
my arms crisscrossed over his chest
in the mirror on the door—

brown boy, white mom—But wait, what’s *that*?
That smudge or shadow on his neck?
Dirt, I said, but he said not.
That’s my skin-tone, you’re being racist!—
twisting his body away from mine.
I breathed in deep. I waited for days
to hear him running the shower too long.

I felt the heat as he emerged,
his head held up so I could see,
chin jutting out in mock-defiance.
I knew not to laugh as I studied his skin.
I knew he’d kill me if I kissed
his clean brown boy neck, shadowless.

Debra Bruce’s most recent book is Survivors’ Picnic, and her poems have been published widely in journals including The Cincinnati Review, Innisfree Poetry Journal, Mezzo Cammin, and Poetry. She is Professor Emerita at Northeastern Illinois University and lives in Chicago.

A biweekly series curated by the Chicago Reader and sponsored by the Poetry Foundation. This week’s poem is curated by poet Yvonne Zipter.

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JOHN GARRISON

NEWS

Prime suspects

Why would anyone benefit from sending unsolicited, free Amazon packages to random addresses?

By **PRINCESS OJIAKU**

The packages started arriving in early October. First came a cell phone case that no one had ordered and that didn't match a phone in the house. The next week brought unusual kitchen supplies. Then a mass of assorted holiday-themed items. All of these deliveries

were from Amazon and addressed to Ben's single-family house in Humboldt Park. (We agreed to let Ben use only his first name to give, at least for the next 1,000 words or so, the illusion of Internet anonymity.)

At first Ben wasn't sure what to make of these unannounced packages with no return

addresses. "My first thought was we have a couple relatives who are older who will, on occasion, send us kind of a random gift from Amazon," he said. He figured that maybe a relative or friend had sent a gift without a note or mention of who it came from. He was wrong. It turned out that no one he

knew had sent the packages. As the number of mystery items piled up, he decided to contact Amazon. Maybe, he reasoned, his personal information had gotten mixed up in some sort of system error.

Ben's call with Amazon led to what he described as "kind of a unique customer

experience.” The customer service associate he spoke with at Amazon was friendly and yet a bit informal. He even used words like “stalker” to describe what might be happening, which Ben found a little strange. “I think he used terms like shady, sketchy, things like that,” he said. “[Those] don’t seem like typical customer relations pamphlet terms that you would use.”

The associate looked up a tracking number from one of the unsolicited packages and identified the Amazon account that ordered the package, along with a few other packages sent to Ben that were associated with the same account. “The only real question he asked me was, ‘Do you know someone by this name?’ And it was Karen.” (We’ve left out her last name, but a Google search brings up a blonde woman in Florida whose Instagram, perhaps unsurprisingly, is not private and with an abundance of selfies.)

When Ben said that neither he nor his wife knew anyone by that name, the person on the phone said he couldn’t tell him any more information about the account, but that Amazon did have instances of fake accounts being used to send packages to publicly available addresses. While the associate told Ben that Amazon couldn’t do anything about blocking or stopping the packages, he said he would make a note of the call and that the team at Amazon would investigate to find out more about the possible fraudulent account. The associate added a strange sign-off: Ben would “probably never hear anything about this again.” Ben received a follow-up e-mail noting his call to Amazon on October 19. The packages continued.

In the middle of November, the Christmas items started arriving on his doorstep. The house received a handful of holiday items—Christmas tree stands, holiday decorations, and about two or three different Christmas tree skirts. The house was now receiving two or three mystery packages a week. Most of the items weren’t useful, except for the happy surprise of a nut milk bag. “Nothing else really was something that we could use practically, but that was a win for her,” Ben said about his wife.

By December, the deliveries abruptly stopped.

There are lots of news reports, Reddit threads, and other accounts of people going through the same thing. In 2017, a woman in Pennsylvania received Amazon

packages from China at the rate of multiple packages per day. The packages were cheap, small things like hair ties, sent directly to her name and home address. Another woman identified as “Nikki” got an unsolicited sex toy in the mail from Amazon, as well as other assorted items like a Bluetooth cord, according to The Daily Beast. Nikki spoke with Amazon customer service multiple times and found the experience mostly unhelpful; the people on the phone were tight-lipped, gave her conflicting answers, and transferred her to incorrect departments. Nikki feared she had a cyberstalker (“It seems so personal,” she said at the time). A quick Google search for “received a package I didn’t order with my name amazon” yields many confused people experiencing the exact same thing as Ben.

How would anyone benefit from sending unsolicited, free Amazon packages to random addresses? A few news reports speculate that when a customer orders something from an unscrupulous source (such as international sellers who are difficult to track or hold under U.S. fraud laws), sellers may be able to lift or sell the buyer’s address for other purposes.

Another more likely theory is that sellers could harvest random addresses found on the Internet and send packages to them to game Amazon’s rating system with “verified buyers.” A verified purchase, according to Amazon, means that “the person writing the review purchased the product at Amazon and didn’t receive the product at a deep discount.” The seller can then leave a verified five-star review for their own item using a phony e-mail address. This technique is called “brushing” and it’s suspected in many of these cases.

In message boards about how Amazon averages product reviews, users argue over third-grade math before agreeing that calculations are futile because verified reviews are weighted more heavily. This passage from Amazon is quoted often: *Amazon calculates a product’s star ratings using a machine learned model instead of a raw data average. The machine learned model takes into account factors including: the age of a review, helpfulness votes by customers and whether the reviews are from verified purchases.*

In the 2019 Reddit thread “I think I’m a victim of an Amazon brushing scam?! What do I do?,” user pug_in_a_rug10 asked if they should be nervous because “someone has got my address and name?!” A few months later,

however, their story ended: “Honestly there was nothing I could do! I got another package after this post and then They finally stopped! I’m sorry. I wish I could be of more help, but there is hope it will stop soon and not be dangerous of anything haha.”

Suspecting he had been “brushed,” Ben found one of the exact products he received on Amazon’s site and looked through its reviews to see if he could find a review from Karen, the name that Amazon told him was behind the account sending him packages. He found that about half of the reviews for the products were anonymous, with a mere “verified buyer” marker. “So there was really no way to figure out if someone connected to my specific situation had purchased and reviewed a product,” Ben told me. But since the Christmas items started arriving in November, he suspects that a seller might have been trying to boost reviews ahead of the holiday season.

After this ordeal, Ben says that he feels that his experience with Amazon’s custom-

er service felt more protective of the sender and the company than protective of him as a customer. Even though Amazon is aware that there are fake or fraudulent accounts, they didn’t seem to do much to ameliorate his particular situation. “It seemed like they said the things . . . they were legally responsible to say to me,” he said. “[It] didn’t really satisfy what I was hoping to get from them.”

I reached out to Amazon for comment. After receiving Ben’s mailing address and e-mail, Amazon said they would follow up with him on his situation and provided the following statement: “We are investigating this customer’s inquiry about unsolicited packages, as this would violate our policies. We remove sellers in violation of these policies, withhold payments, and work with law enforcement to take appropriate action.”

Ben still has not heard anything from Amazon. But he also hasn’t received another package. 

 @artfulaction

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ILLINOIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM
IHMEC: Courtesy of Harold Berger

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ARTS & CULTURE



Julia Campione
MARZENA ABRAHAMIK

COMMUNITY

Blood, ink, and tears

Tattooing is still dominated by white men, but women, nonbinary people, and people of color are making their mark.

By MEGGIE GATES

Tattoo artist Emily Kempf lives in a world of her own. Her shop, Time Being Tattoo, models itself after female artists Kempf looks up to, like Tine Defiore at Black Oak. It's light, filled with mystical paintings, and has female indie rock pouring from speakers. I walk

in with whitewashed jeans and point to where I want a tattoo. I'm after a large image on my arm that reminds me of Virginia Woolf, and I reiterate this hoping it might make Kempf think I'm cool. As she begins, she asks how I'm doing because the inside of a forearm is one of the more painful spots to get a tattoo. "Great,

I'm just concentrating really hard right now and not really breathing," I say. She stops and looks concerned. "That's the worst thing you can do. Breathe. Please don't do that."

The 21,000 tattoo parlors in the United States are dominated by cis heterosexual white male artists. Just one-third of the artists are women, and of that third, the vast majority are white women. There are no easily accessible statistics on how many queer people and people of color make up the industry.

According to many in the industry, sexism in the community has more to do with the schism between old school and new school artists. Historically, tattoos conjure up thoughts of

bikers and metal shops, the kind of people you'd see on TV riding motorcycles in dive bar parking lots, dust kicking up around their feet. The tattoo world is largely considered by many artists a boy's club, one with ins and outs that are hard to maneuver. However, there's been a palpable shift in recent years toward making the community more welcoming. There are now more women, nonbinary folks, members of the LGBTQ community, and people of color in the industry than ever before.

Women have long been a part of the culture. Tattooing was a form of expression for indigenous women on St. Lawrence Island starting as early as the 1900s. After missionaries

arrived to discourage what they considered “disfigurement” for women, the last group of women were officially tattooed in 1923. By the 1950s, tattooing became ingrained in mainstream Western society. People would refuse to tattoo women unless they were 21, and women would often need to be accompanied by their boyfriend or husband.

Sinah Theres Kloß, author of *Tattoo Histories: Transcultural Perspectives on the Narratives, Practices, and Representations of Tattooing*, explores how female- and male-bodied people are viewed in western culture. Changes to the female body are considered direct attacks against feminine beauty standards and a challenge to patriarchal oppression. Masculinity, however, is reinforced and strengthened through tattoos. While one is considered an act of political resistance, the other is considered inherent to gender. Just boys being boys.

Though the tattoo world looks different today, the unbalanced scales toward female, people of color, and queer artists is still prevalent. Shops differ depending on where you go, but, in general, behavior towards women, people of color, and the LGBTQ community depends on who’s in charge.

“There tends to be a dynamic, and I think it depends on who runs the shop and what they let fly, but sometimes it’s the owner themselves perpetuating bad behavior,” says Julia Campione, a tattoo artist at Good Omen Tattoo who has worked in the industry for five years. “It’s just the experience of being a woman or a nonbinary person.”

Sema Graham is a nonbinary artist of middle eastern descent who has been tattooing for three years, also at Time Being Tattoo. They have integrated their culture into the imagery they tattoo, such as jars and textiles serving their style. Operating outside of the binary, they discuss the hand tattooing had in helping them with their gender identity. Graham desires more diverse artists in the community who understand the struggle trans and nonbinary people have facing such drastic changes to their body.

“Part of why I started getting tattooed is because of queer identity things and you look at the demographic and there’s not a lot of tattooers who are queer people like myself,” Graham says. “In the grand scheme of things, it’s probably still 90 percent white men.”

There’s an unspoken agreement about the right way and wrong way to break in to the industry. People who come up

on Instagram and build a following from stick and poke tattoos are considered “new school,” while those who have done apprenticeships and studied under established artists are considered “old school.” For some, the pushback has been less than ideal.

“There’s this gatekeeper-y, bully, ‘protect

“You can’t just tiptoe into tattooing. You have to throw yourself in and that is psychologically, physically, emotionally, and financially difficult.”

—Julia Campione

the tradition at all cost’ attitude,” Kempf says. “It’s not gendered, it’s girl or guy. A guy came up to me when I was bartending and after he learned I stick and poked, he was very rude to me. I was like, *why is he so mad, I’m not doing anything wrong.*”

The DIY approach towards tattooing is largely popular today. Artists maneuver the Internet to build a following for their brand and style and to grow their clientele. Now, artists have the means to post immediate flash deals to their Instagram

story and list their e-mail on their site.

“Social media has been a huge influence on tattooing and that has brought a lot of conversation that pertains to what studios and shops look like,” Campione says. “I see people go out of their way to post, whether it’s social or environmental, shops that practice mindfulness across the board. That’s the magic about tattoos, you can change how people feel in an instant so you need to be aware of your bedside manners because that’s the type of energy that will resonate with that person.”

“It’s not just women, it’s everybody on the rise now because of social media. Femme, queer, nonbinary tattoo artists are on the rise now,” Kempf says. “Anybody who wants to go buy a machine can go on Amazon and do it now.”

Graham emphasizes how important behind-the-scenes behavior is in addition to bedside behavior. Deconstructing inner beliefs in a society socialized towards looking down on women and queer people intersects with tackling issues surrounding race. As a queer person of color, Graham admits some of the worst stories they’ve heard involve racism towards brown skin people. Often, artists will complain about the difficulties in tattooing darker skinned people and deny them opportunities to tattoo.

Common are comments about clients’ skin tones being hard to work with or, “oh, this piece would be really cool if it was done on someone who wasn’t as dark skin,” says Graham. “I want to acknowledge I’m very white passing so the fact I was able to get an apprenticeship and work in a shop I’m very thankful for. But my friends who are Black and tattooing deal with racism way worse than I ever will.”

Starting off drawing from a young age, both Kempf and Campione moved to tattooing later in life. Kempf’s mom pushed her to follow her talent and she eventually began stick and poke for people on tour with her band Dehd. For Campione, the lifestyle started immediately.

“You can’t just tiptoe into tattooing. You have to throw yourself in and that is psychologically, physically, emotionally, and financially difficult,” Campione says. “There was always that fear of am I ever going to get booked up? What’s the next step? All those things.”

Apprenticeships are considered the “right way,” but they are not always the friendliest environments. Graham, who worked an apprenticeship for a year, said overall, it was a good experience. Though, there were moments that stuck out as less than ideal.

“For the past year I was working at this shop two days a week that was definitely a boys’

club,” Graham says. “It’s a stereotype for a reason. I would say the majority of tattoo shops are that way, lots of dicks jokes and derogatory comments made about women and queer folks.”

All three agree, in a city as big as Chicago, where discrimination in shops still exists, it’s important for artists to stick together in moments of hardship.

“Dealing with individuals during my apprenticeship who thought they could say certain things that were highly unprofessional and definitely offensive made me feel fortunate for all the different female artists I’ve been able to connect with,” Campione says.

Culturally, women in the tattoo world are expected to act a certain way. Words like “tramp stamp” and “biker babes” have hypersexualized the way people view women with tattoos. Living up to the “cool girl persona” in general affects how women turn a blind eye to bad behavior.

“This one shop there was a woman I talked to who was super old school about tattoos who told me, ‘oh, I’ve never had a problem with the guys because I’m one of the boys,’” Kempf says. “It’s a lot of internalized misogyny.”

“One of the guys” is considered a rite of passage for some, and it is one that affects relationships in the tattoo world. Catering to the male gaze is something deeply embedded in how many women think, and that mindset can result in putting down fellow artists.

“To be in the boys’ club it feels like you must be the token hot chick tattoo girl, and you work a million times harder than them to be there,” Kempf says. “I’m not saying that’s bad, but you don’t need to put down other women in the process.”

Outside of working in shops, many tattooed people experience nonconsensual interactions. Body art encourages people to comment, poke fun at, and even grab bodies whenever they please. Consent is eradicated and for some the ability to stand up to people can be difficult. Both Kempf and Campione have experienced their fair share of this happening on the street.

“I notice how guys comment on my tattoos on the street,” Campione says. “You have to be the force in that situation to let that person know *do not touch me* because there is plenty of ignorance and people sometimes do not understand how uncomfortable they make that person when they call out their tattoos.”

Men can be victims of gender-based bias in the tattoo world as well. “There were a couple guys I tattooed early on who you could tell weren’t OK, and when I asked to ➔

ARTS & CULTURE

continued from 11

make sure they were OK with being tattooed I could tell they had been conditioned to just swallow the pain as a man in the world,” Kempf says. “I’d try so hard to be like, *It’s OK if it hurts, you can cry if you need to and we can take a break.* But they’d just do the tough guy thing.”

For Graham, an area of growth they’d like to see in the industry would be more brown skinned people on the scene.

“Racism in tattooing is so normalized,” Graham says. “I would just really love to be a part of a change in my industry.”

The tattoo industry reflects a bigger problem in society but the community, more than any, grew from roots of an image leaning towards a gentleman’s club, one where signs of “don’t cry” and “man up” pepper their work space. Unlike shops of the past, places like Black Oak, Ash & Ivory, Copper Plate, Them, and Butter Fat are women- and LGBTQ-run shops that encourage clients to cry when they need to and speak up when something’s wrong.

“Tattoo shops are extremely masculine

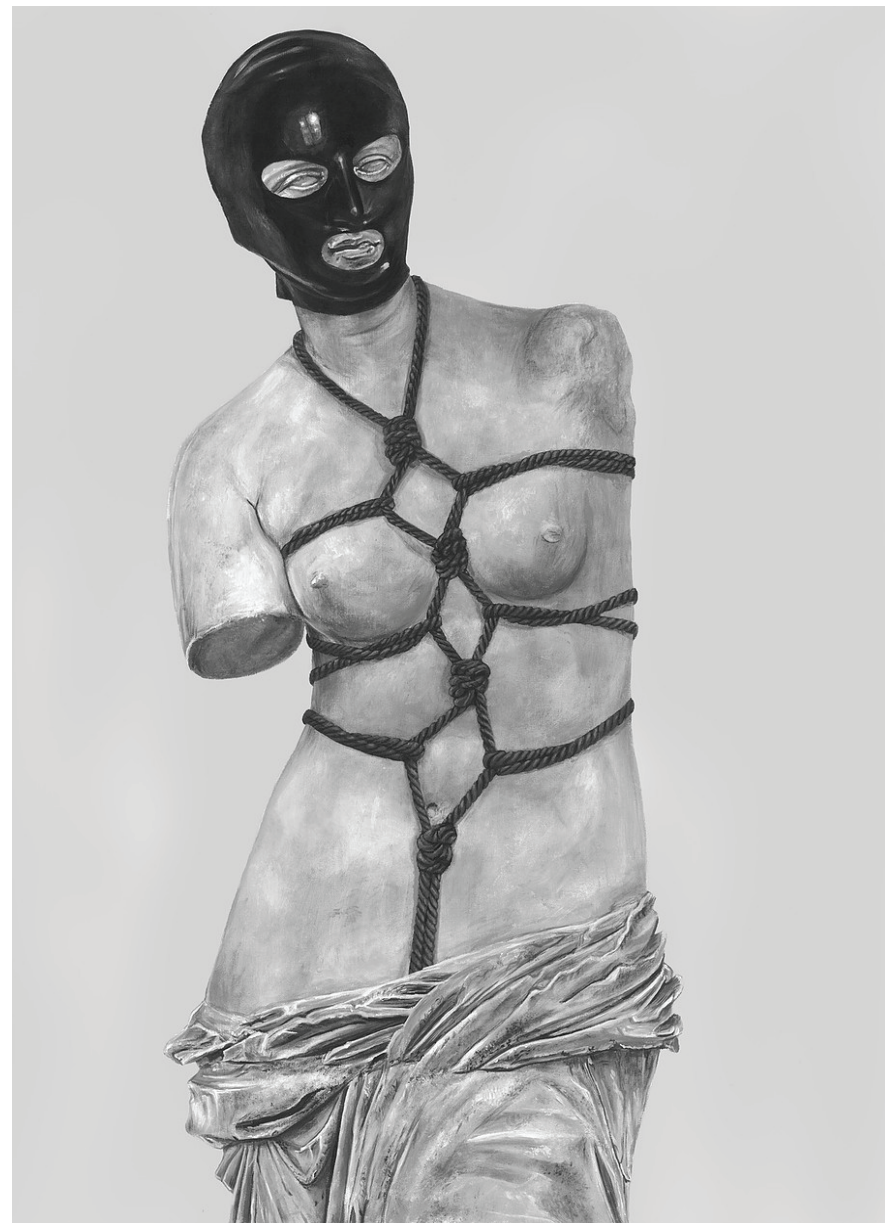
spaces and I think people have negative experiences so we strive to make it a positive one,” Graham says. “For a lot of other queer tattooers I know that’s a huge part of their practice.”

The pamphlet Kempf gives me before I leave is the same she gave before my tattoo appointment. It details how her shop provides a safe space for consent between client and artist: speak up if it hurts. Tattoos hurt! Don’t be afraid to cry! Adamant about putting my safety first, she makes sure I read it before we begin. It details how important the ebb and flow between artist and client is, how ambience, trust, and patience all intersect. She asks if she can take a photo of my arm, giddy about the art she’s created, and asks if she can turn it towards the light, holding up her hand and asking if it’s OK with her eyes. I send my friends her Instagram of my tattooed arm, reveling in the feeling of being let into her inner circle. Women and queer people are no longer on the outskirts of the industry. They are the industry. 

 @meggie_gates

“You Will Die”

Through 2/14. Closing exhibition with a Dark Valentine’s Day Party, Fri 2/14, 7 PM-10 PM, Public Works Gallery, 1539 N. Damen, publicworksgallery.com **FREE**



VISUAL ARTS

‘You Will Die’ reminds us of our mortality

Metal art breaks into the white-wall gallery.

By S. NICOLE LANE

It felt like a typical trip to a music venue; there was even a line down the street. Public Works Gallery had reached capacity and the room was packed. It’s pretty

unheard of for an art show to reach its limit, but for a show like this, it makes sense. Pressing against a sea of black leather, I entered the space and immediately ran into

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ARTS & CULTURE

Venus de Milo

NOELIA TOWERS

people I knew, people whom I usually see at metal shows. We don't bump into each other at art shows. We don't converse between paintings and illustrations. Yet there we were, brought to the gallery by a shared love for metal and metalheads for the exhibit "You Will Die."

The nine artists in the show are from around the world, some as close as Chicago, others as far as Poland, Russia, Israel, and Germany. Curated by Scott Shellhamer, a former member of metal band American Heritage, and Josh Zoerner of Public Works, the show is a way for them to invite their friends, peers, and idols to exhibit their work in a white-wall gallery, a rare occasion for this style of art.

In the gallery, a limited-run apparel line for the show was propped up in the back with two long-sleeve T-shirts and a crop top designed by Noelia Towers and Justin Bartlett. Marz Community Brewing even debuted a limited-release "You Will Die" beer, a Nordic Double IPA.

On the surface, the featured works of art seem to portray the obvious: terror, the macabre, darkness. The works have a heavy narrative and borrow from 16th-century paintings that depict the terrifying reality of human existence. However, these artists are responding to cultural, social, and economic structures in society that have contributed to the dread in the world.

Pushing around the people, the beer, and the merchandise (and even mac and cheese from go-to metal food joint Kuma's Corner), I found myself incredibly drawn to the work of Eliran Kantor, a Berlin-based digital paint artist who has designed album covers for bands like Hatebreed, Gwar, and Aghora. His work is gory, morbid, and violent—and it's absolutely breathtaking. The piece *Hangman* was commissioned by the band Artizan for their song "The Hangman" and features a person smiling, looking upwards in a joyful manner, as the lower halves of four bodies dangle above him. Metal art typically displays scenes of dystopian landscapes or a magical, mystical atmosphere. In Kantor's work, the scenes nod at folklore and capture a moment that resembles an ancient tale. Here, we see a hangman enjoying himself as the bodies of those he hanged dangle with bells on the bot-

tom of their feet. He waves a baton in his hand to orchestrate the sound of death.

On the back wall of the gallery are the paintings of Noelia Towers, whose work depicts the artist in settings that touch on her struggles with chronic illness and how sexuality and bondage tie into this experience. In the piece *The Pain That Keeps on Giving* she paints herself seated in an office chair with a black hood over her face and barbed wire around her abdomen. The figure is wearing black leather gloves and staring directly at the viewer. The barbed wire resembles her pain with ulcerative colitis, which manifests itself as tiny stabs to her lower half. Her body is harming itself, which is why Towers paints a ski mask over her head—she is her own executioner.

As someone within the metal scene, and grateful to finally see a metal art exhibition, I was at ease with those around me. I spotted friends I had never seen at an art show before. I had deep discussions about the work. While this is a solid foundation for a show of this theme, more metal artwork from women, people of color, and those within the LGBTQ community would have expanded the scope of the exhibition. "You Will Die" scratched the surface of metal art; it invited the heroes, the godfathers, and the successful. But I challenge the curators to expand on this theme in the future. The metal community is filled with white cis and straight men while women and people of color take a back seat. Nevertheless, they are present, and are more and more pushing toward the front of the stage and making themselves visible. There isn't a lack of people of color or women in the scene. In fact, there is a laundry list of Black-and women-fronted bands like Straight Line Stitch, Myrkur, and Agoraphobic Nosebleed. These marginalized communities within the metal scene could have created a more diverse and powerful array of artwork. (Maybe next time, guys?)

"You Will Die" does what it intended to do. It celebrates the icons of extreme metal art and features work by artists who those in the scene admire. Most importantly, it is a reminder to question our dismal existence and emphasize the reality that yes, we will all die. 📷

🐦 @snicolelane



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ARTS & CULTURE



Sandy Honig, Alyssa Stonoha, and Mitra Jouhari are *Three Busy Debras*.

COURTESY ADULT SWIM

COMEDY

Get brunch in Lemoncurd

Watch the best of the comedy trio *Three Busy Debras* before their Tomorrow Never Knows show and Adult Swim series.

By JACK RIEDY

They're all named Debra. If asked about the root of their friendship, that's the level of introspection one could expect from the deranged housewives portrayed by Mitra Jouhari (*High Maintenance*, *The Big Sick*), Sandy Honig (*Vice Live*, *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*), and Alyssa Stonoha (*The Chris Gethard Show*, *The Special Without Brett Davis*) in *Three Busy Debras*. Though their sketches are filled with incongruous, grotesque dialogue and props, the comedians hold their Stepford-esque characters to three ground rules: "All Debras are small, all Debras are busy, all Debras are quiet." Before their Adult Swim series premieres this spring, Jouhari, Honig, and Stonoha are bringing *Three Busy Debras* to the Hideout on January 18 for a sold-out show as part of the 2020 Tomorrow Never Knows festival. ("They just flew into Chicago and BOY are they all named Debra!" the event page smirks.)

The group's work satirizes the point where complete self-confidence dissolves into groupthink. Beyond the titular Connecticut housewives, they have embodied this vapid contradiction as middle-aged businessmen,

white feminists, and more. The group's comedy makes perfect sense for the era of the deep-fried meme and cursed image in that it runs on a healthy stream of nonsense.

The three comedians learned of each other's work through Twitter and began performing together in Upright Citizens Brigade shows in 2015. Their dead-eyed Debra characters originated in an improv exercise and soon became the focus of a proudly gonzo one-act play. Despite delving into "incest, necrophilia, the Holocaust, 9/11, Kony 2012, kidnapping, pedophilia, suicide, matricide, masturbation, infidelity committed with ghosts, and brunch," it sold out The Annoyance Theatre's now-shuttered Brooklyn outpost. The following year they brought an expanded musical version to Carnegie Hall, performing with no crew in a recital hall rented via Kickstarter donations. Soon after that, *Saturday Night Live* and *Parks and Recreation* star Amy Poehler contacted the trio with an offer to produce a television series through her company Paper Kite.

Last spring, Adult Swim announced a first season order for *Three Busy Debras*, which

depicted the daily lives of the characters in the fictional affluent suburb of Lemoncurd, Connecticut. The quarter-hour series will mark the first wholly created by women in the channel's history, a gender imbalance widely criticized as the cult favorite channel has grown in popularity.

Whether preparing for the live show or the TV series, it's worth getting acquainted with the best sketches from *Three Busy Debras*.

"Brunch"

Honig fumbles with an all-knife cutlery set, preparing an all-white table for brunch. She wears all white in a white void of a room. Stonoha apologizes for being late, her eyeline perpendicular to Honig's face. "I was at my son's school for the PTSD meeting," she says. "It's nice to get in a room with other parents and talk about the war. And snacks." It's a setup/punch line combo that would make Mel Brooks proud, delivered in the eerie forced joviality of a personal assistant.

During what Stonoha calls "the makeover," Jouhari gives Honig a black eye, then pulls

blood-red thread out of her forehead. It's a brief sample of the world of Lemoncurd, equal parts thrilling and revolting.

"Three Fuckable Men"

Sandwiched on either side by Stonoha and Jouhari, Honig bolts up from a twin mattress in a brown mustache and bellows, "We need business cards!" Here the comedians play middle-aged men Dick Clit (Stonoha), Chab Michael Murray (Honig), and Doritos Twix (Jouhari). Though the men boast of interesting occupations, like Twix as an "interior decorator for *Cars 2: Herbie Fully Loaded*," the video shows them failing to purchase business cards from a lipstick-saturated cashier played uncredited by Conner O'Malley in drag. Their proposed method of payment is disgusting, but so are men.

"Three White Feminists Screw In A Lightbulb"

Three cooler-than-thou women whose knowledge of feminism begins and ends with Urban Outfitters T-shirts struggle to change

a lightbulb. They don't converse, they parrot, speaking in catchphrases. They're just as vapid as the Debras, women these "feminists" would surely mock before wishing their girl crush Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a real person. "What's the matter, boys?" Stonoha growls. "Never seen a strong, aggressive, annoying woman before?"

shedrinksthemilk.com

Before entering the group's official website, a user must click through three separate videos of each member drinking milk from a long stem wine glass in front of a dirty window on a sunny day. Stonoha chugs while gazing resolutely into the distance, stopping only when the video begins another loop. Honig and Jouhari each take a sip then smile like they're caught in a fond dairy-based memory. It's jarring enough to be a great introduction to the trio's style.

"Cha Cha Slide"

The Debras sing "Cha Cha Slide" over a canned instrumental, accompanied by a

blood-soaked publicity photo. They alternate between mimicking the immortal commands and immortal-er sound effects of Chicagoan DJ Casper's 2000 hit in nightmarish three-part harmony. It's like a karaoke night in Hell.

"A Fashion Improvisation With Three Busy Debras"

New York Magazine's fashion blog *The Cut* invited the trio to improvise using couture clothing as props in a short directed by Sandy's brother Jake Honig. The format is clearly inspired by "Brunch" but includes motifs from elsewhere in their work, like an off-key rendition of "Happy Birthday" and milk. The spine-tingling highlight comes when Honig pours milk from a ridiculous pitcher into Stonoha's mouth, and she then spits the liquid into a wine glass for Jouhari to gleefully slurp through a straw. The sketch concludes as the three comedians sigh blissfully and chime "The busy life of a Debra" in perfect unison. 

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THEATER

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Whisper House © EVAN HANOVER

REVIEW

The fog of war

A lighthouse in WWII provides the backdrop for a macabre and whimsical musical.

By ALBERT WILLIAMS

One might have thought that a ten-year-old show with libretto by Kyle Jarrow (author of *A Very Merry Unauthorized Children's Scientology Pageant*, seen in Chicago at A Red Orchid Theatre in the late 2000s, as well as Broadway's *SpongeBob SquarePants*) and a score by Duncan Sheik (composer of the landmark rock musical *Spring Awakening*) would have been snapped up by some Chicago theater long before now. But it's taken a decade for the Sheik-Jarrow *Whisper House*, which received its world premiere at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre in 2010, to make its way here. Well, better late than never.

Presented in an intimate staging by director Ed Rutherford for Black Button Eyes Productions, *Whisper House* is at once spooky and sweet, whimsical and macabre, ironic and

touching. Recalling a cartoon tale by illustrator Edward Gorey, it's the story of 11-year-old Christopher (Leo Spiegel), who is sent to live with his reclusive, crippled aunt Lily (Kate Nawrocki) after his father (Lily's older brother) is killed in action during World War II and his mother is committed to an asylum following a

RR WHISPER HOUSE
Through 2/15: Thu-Sat 8 PM,
Sun 2 PM, Athenaeum Theatre,
2936 N. Southport, 773-935-6875,
blackbuttoneyes.com, \$30.

mental breakdown. Lily lives in a lighthouse on the foggy coast of Maine, all alone except for her Japanese handyman, Yasuhiro (Karmann Bajuyo)—and for two ghosts (Kevin Webb and Mikaela Sullivan), spirits of a couple killed in a

shipwreck 20 years earlier.

Though Lily does her best to ignore the phantoms who haunt her, Christopher is susceptible to their mischievous, and maybe malevolent, intentions. When a German U-boat is spotted offshore, the local sheriff (T.J. Anderson) warns Lily that Yasuhiro faces arrest as an enemy alien. The situation forces vulnerable Christopher to make choices that will alter the lives of himself and all around him. Under these circumstances, maybe—as the ghosts sing in the score's opening song—Christopher and lonely Lily would both be “better off dead.”

Sheik's songs, melodic and rhythmically catchy in an alternative-country-rock vein, are mostly sung by the specters, who function as a sort of Greek chorus, commenting on the action while influencing the characters in ambiguous ways. This means that Christopher, the protagonist, does not express his emotional growth through music as one would usually expect in a musical. Happily, Spiegel—making his professional debut as Christopher—is an expressive and polished young performer who makes the audience genuinely interested in his moral struggle. **A**



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Thirst
© JON COLE MEDIA

REVIEW

The havoc of loss

In *Thirst*, survivors of an apocalyptic war battle nostalgia and each other.

By **MAX MALLER**

Three distinct responses to the havoc of loss circle one another in playwright C.A. Johnson's searing war show, *Thirst*, set in a postapocalyptic southern landscape of food rations and militarized watering holes.

For dogged and pragmatic Samira (Tracie Taylor), the past is something you can always keep at bay with a big enough gun. Vulnerability is the enemy of survival. Living in pine woods outside a failed state is both her way of keeping safe and an effective means not to get

woman, and their adopted son Kalil (Saniyah As-Salaam).

If Terrance represents nostalgia's vices and Samira stands for putting the hurt to bed as best you can, Kalil occupies the middle. He's a child of the war. There's no world for him without blood in it, no past either to avoid or reclaim, only a present which promises nothing. But that nothing includes growing up, making friends with the soldiers, games of tag around the campsite. In one beautiful speech, As-Salaam reaches a hand as high as it will go, remembering what it was like to hold his birth mother's hand. And he smiles! There may be a huge crack in the world, but what's famine and mortality to a happy kid?

As-Salaam is an amazing talent. Director Andrea J. Dymond's cast is strong top to bottom, although only one of them seemed especially concerned with portraying his character as a southerner. I have admired Johnard Washington's acting before, but I was utterly delighted by his performance as Bankhead, Terrance's reasonable right hand. Washington brings so much style to this role, so much calm authority, that you often don't know whether this incredible knowingness about people is his or the character's. I wanted to sit there and listen to him dress down everybody's flimsy self-justifications all night. Bankhead alone, the wise comedian and friend, seems to blame the war for everyone's grief—while they go on blaming each other. **A**

bogged down in what she had to leave behind her when the world crumbled.

Less willing to move on is Terrance (Gregory J. Fields), a Black revolutionary leader and Samira's ex-husband. You learn gradually what drove the two apart, but Terrance, who's gotten power-drunk lately, isn't a forgetter. Known locally as Well-Man for his and his men's dominion over that precious resource, he's acquired the kind of direful sway that makes him oblivious to what's salvageable in life and what's not, and he wants Samira back. He refuses to realize that not only does Samira not love him anymore, but she couldn't go back even if she did because ultimately, there's no "back" to return to. What sustains her now is her new wife, Greta (Laura Resinger), a white

ARThirst

Through 2/15: Thu-Sat 7:30 PM, Sun 4 PM; also Mon 1/27, 7:30 PM (industry), Strawdog Theatre, 1802 W. Berenice, 773-644-1380, strawdog.org, \$35, \$26 seniors, half-price rush and students

THEATER



Bunny's Book Club © SUZANNE PLUNKETT

OPENING

RR Booksmart

The joy of reading transcends species in *Bunny's Book Club*.

Based on Annie Silvestro's children's book of the same title, this Lifeline Theatre KidSeries world premiere, adapted by Aly Renee Amidei and directed by Anthony Kayer, is a joyful celebration of reading and its ability to expand imaginations. Animals interested in reading could be a challenging conceit, but the production is liberal in its anthropomorphism, with modern costumes only hinting at each character's animal characteristics.

Bunny (Whitney Dottery) realizes she's the only one among her furry friends without a "calling" or passion; Mole, Porcupine, and Bear are preoccupied with favorite hobbies like digging, eating, and sleeping. One afternoon she comes upon a librarian hosting a story time outside the library. Her guide into this new world of words,

books, and stories? Intelligent and street-savvy Raccoon (Dakota Hughes), who is already wise to the world of the library and the immersive allure of books. Hughes steals the show, playing Raccoon like a New York tough with a hidden well of knowledge, humor, and desire to connect. After the pair hear stories about Mount Everest, Treasure Island, and more, Bunny becomes singularly focused on getting into the library, reading up, and starting her own book club.

Recommended for ages five and up, this one-act drew in younger audience members with physical comedy and direct address on the afternoon I attended. Kids were quick to answer even the most rhetorical of questions, and perhaps that storytelling component could be expanded even further to maintain engagement throughout. —**MARISSA OBERLANDER** *BUNNY'S BOOK CLUB* Through 2/16: Sat-Sun 11 AM and 1 PM; also Sat 2/1, 3 PM (autism/sensory-friendly performance), Lifeline Theatre, 6912 N. Glenwood, 773-761-4477, lifelinetheatre.com, \$20 adults, \$15 children 2-18.

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READER



Dolittle

notes about languages and customs. He was the charitable anthropologist of early adventure literature. For children, he modeled a different kind of colonial relationship—for better and worse.

Doctor Dolittle has been adapted to film several times since the 1960s, but *Dolittle*, the newly released version directed by Stephen Gaghan, is unusual in embracing the adventure roots. British Veterinarian John Dolittle (Robert Downey Jr.) has through study learned to speak the languages of every creature from elephants to stick insects. He's also a miracle-working doctor, and so he's called out of retirement to try to cure the ailing Queen Victoria (Jessie Buckley). Setting off to retrieve a miraculous fruit from the far ends of the earth, he's aided by CGI animals including the mothering parrot Polynesia (voiced by Emma Thompson), the cowardly gorilla Chee-Chee (Rami Malek), and a human apprentice named Tommy Stubbins (Harry Collett).

Young action heroes are often chosen for greatness because of their propensity for violence. But Stubbins, we learn, is a worthy apprentice because he hates to kill animals and refuses to treat them as property. Similarly, when Dolittle and crew sail off into the hinterlands, they don't inflict Indiana Jones-like carnage on the people or animals who live there. There's still conflict with rulers of distant nations and with various big bad monsters. These are generally resolved, however, not by martial arts or firearm, but by negotiation, kindness, and treating psychiatric conditions and stomach aches alike. Dolittle wins the world through soft power.

You can read *Dolittle*, then, as a goofy but sincere rebuke to the uber-violence of our current action and superhero films. The narrative may jerk about incessantly, and there are too many characters to develop any of them with much finesse. But the message for kids is clear enough—making friends and helping folks is better than murdering or controlling them. The best superpower isn't energy blasts or superstrength to destroy your enemies. It's the ability to talk to everyone, so you can turn them from enemies into friends.

The problem is that a nonviolent colonial adventure narrative doesn't just promote nonviolence, it also misrepresents colonial-

ism. The movie endeavors to be a gentle, harmless romp. But the story it tells is about British people going to other countries and stealing stuff on behalf of the Queen.

Similarly, Dolittle insists that he doesn't own his animal friends. But in the film they function mostly as servants and retainers—less like animals than like subjugated, marginalized people from Britain's far-flung empire. The animals dress Dolittle, feed him, trim his beard, and allow themselves to be talked into letting him ride on their backs. The only character who expresses resentment at this situation, or who wonders why he's wandering around with humans in the first place, is a squirrel voiced by Craig Robinson. His reasonable critiques are, without exception, treated as punch lines, and he's presented as borderline insane.

The film does realize the animals have to have some motivation to involve themselves in human affairs and to risk their lives for the queen, so it provides one. Because of his service to royalty in the past, Dolittle was granted land for a nature preserve, where all the animals live. This bequest lasts only as long as the current queen lives, though. This is an incredibly shortsighted and callous way to set up such a trust, but no one voices an objection. The queen's nobility is indisputable in the film; her charity (enabled by massive wealth taken from where?) means she has a claim on the animals forever. By such means does equality become indistinguishable from vassalage.

Of course, it's just a children's film. But silly plots often are silly because they're taking the cultural path of least resistance, and kids who are taught that white people at the seat of empire are more important than everyone else not infrequently grow up to be adults who think the same thing. As in real life, so in children's films—those who call for non-violence need to be careful lest they end up apologizing for injustice. It's great to want to communicate with the whole world. But it's worth remembering that in reality, the rulers of the whole world often learn other people's languages the better to tell them what to do. ■

🐦 @nberlat

REVIEW

Dolittle teaches that communication is key

But the pro-colonialism narrative leaves something to be desired.

By NOAH BERLATSKY

The original *Doctor Dolittle* books turned colonial narratives into gentle stories for children. Like other heroes of the late 1800s and early 1900s—Tarzan, Professor Challenger, Allan Quatermain, John Carter—John Dolittle went to Africa, to the South Seas, and (thanks to a giant moth) to the moon. But unlike those contemporaries, Dolittle didn't kill or conquer. Instead, he stitched up wounds on beasts and humans alike, and made copious

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Jezebel

NOW PLAYING

RR Ashes and Diamonds

One of the first works of the Polish New Wave, Andrzej Wajda's 1958 film is a compelling piece, although it's been somewhat overrated by critics who considered its story of a resistance fighter's ideological struggle as a cagey bit of anti-Soviet propaganda, and hence automatically admirable. Following the art cinema technique of the time, Wajda tends toward harsh and overstated imagery, but he achieves a fascinating psychological rapport with his lead actor, Zbigniew Cybulski—who was known as Poland's James Dean. In Polish with subtitles. —**DAVE KEHR** 107 min. Sun 1/19, 7 PM. Doc Films

RR The General

Buster Keaton may have made more significant films, but *The General* (1926) stands as an almost perfect entertainment. Keaton is a locomotive engineer in the Civil War south whose train is hijacked by Union spies; his attempts to bring it back become a strangely moving and very funny account of man's love for machine. Marion Mack is the girl, who can't quite compete. —**DAVE KEHR** 80 min. Sat 1/18 and Mon 1/20, 11 PM. Logan Theatre

RR Jezebel

Though this independent drama is set in Las Vegas, one can hardly glean that from the film itself—there are references to casinos, but we never see them or hardly any of Sin City's other distinguishable markers. The emphasis, instead, is more on private spaces, an approach that befits the film, which writer-director Numa Perrier based on her own experiences as a young woman in the late 1990s. It centers around two Black women, sisters Tiffany (Tiffany Tenille) and Sabrina (Perrier), who do sex work in order to survive. Sabrina, the older sister, is a phone sex operator, and Tiffany, calling herself Jezebel, begins work as a live model on an Internet chat site after their mother dies. Perrier explores sex work—specifically as it applies to Black women—with impressive verisimilitude. Most remarkable is her astute use of space; the closed-off feel conveys both characters' struggles (with racial and economic oppression) as well as the intimacy they experience with each other and through sex work. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** 88 min. Facets

RR Les Misérables

In naming this compelling police procedural

after Victor Hugo's seminal masterpiece, director Ladji Ly (who cowrote the script with Giordano Gederlini and Alexis Manenti) takes a bold stance right off the bat, and he manages to sustain it throughout this noteworthy feature debut. The film, inspired by the 2005 French riots, takes place in Montfermeil (the location of both the riots and the Thénardiens' inn in Hugo's novel). It follows three policemen over the course of a particularly fraught day, during which one of them shoots a young boy—the contemporary Gavroche—with a flash-ball gun during a confrontation. Ly takes almost an hour getting to this point, spends the next half-hour detailing the immediate aftermath, then arrives at a harrowing, near-anarchic climax. The director based this on his own experiences growing up in Les Bosquets, and he gives the film, which at times resembles a documentary, a sense of knowingness that makes its finale all the more chilling; Ly posits that, all things considered, some outcomes are unavoidable. In French with subtitles. —**KATHLEEN SACHS** R, 102 min. Music Box Theatre

RR Loving Vincent

A team of 115 oil painters executed some 65,000 canvases in the style of Vincent Van Gogh to create this extraordinary animation about the painter's last days. Following Van Gogh's death from a mysterious gunshot wound, young Armand Roulin, whose family in the French town of Arles posed for numerous Van Gogh portraits, sets out to determine whether the death was murder, suicide, or an accident—and, moreover, why the painter, who appeared happy and productive during his time in Arles, might have chosen that moment to take his own life. The roiling landscape scenes betray the redundancy of animating images that already sizzle with energy, but the portraiture works beautifully, especially because the actors who supply the characters' voices and visages are first-rate (especially Chris O'Dowd as Roulin's postman father, a compassionate soul with insights into the damaged artist). —**J.R. JONES** PG-13, 95 min. Wed 1/22, 7:30 PM. Beverly Art Center

Mandy

Writer-director Panos Cosmatos follows up his underground hit *Beyond the Black Rainbow* (2010) with another atmospheric, slow-moving horror film set in 1983. Somewhere in the woods of the Pacific Northwest, a lumberjack (Nicolas Cage) and his wife (Andrea Riseborough) get abducted by an acid-eating religious cult; the cult mem-

bers kill the wife in a bizarre ritual, and the lumberjack, arming himself with everything from crossbows to chainsaws, enacts bloody revenge on the Jesus freaks. That's pretty much the entire plot—Cosmatos is less interested in telling a story than in setting a mood, lingering on most of the shots until they become hypnotically fascinating or deathly dull, depending on your point of view. (The synth-driven score, by the late Jóhann Jóhannsson, goes a long way in establishing the vibe.) I didn't much care for the film, but I can see how it might appeal to gorehounds and fans of genre cinema. —**BEN SACHS** 121 min. Fri 1/17-Sat 1/18, midnight. Music Box Theatre

RR Mean Streets

Martin Scorsese's intrusive insistence on his abstract, metaphysical theme—the possibility of modern sainthood—marks this 1973 film, his first to attract critical notice, as still somewhat immature, yet the acting and editing have such an original, tumultuous force that the picture is completely gripping. Harvey Keitel is the young mobster on the rise; Robert De Niro is his brutish, irresponsible nemesis, whom he's determined to love. With Amy Robinson, Cesare Danova, and George Memmoli. —**DAVE KEHR** R, 112 min. Fri 1/17, 6 PM and Wed 1/22, 8 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center

RR My Neighbor Totoro

Sheer enchantment, this 1989 animated feature is a key early work by Hayao Miyazaki (*Spirited Away*). A man and his two daughters move into an old house in the countryside and encounter Totoro, a giant slothlike (and slothful) creature who arranges for the girls to visit their ailing mother, riding in a phantom Cheshire-cat bus. Like much of Miyazaki's work, the film has an ecological bent that recalls the Shinto reverence for animal spirits and reflects quintessential Asian values like respect for one's parents and community in the face of crisis. It exemplifies Ghibli's style of fanciful realism, paying close attention to minute details as well-drawn figures move across a fluid backdrop. It also deals straightforwardly with substantial emotions like fear of death, though at times it veers toward the heart-tugging cuteness of the *Pokemon* series. —**TED SHEN** G, 86 min. Sat 1/18-Mon 1/20, 11:30 AM. Music Box Theatre

RR Park Row

This neglected Samuel Fuller feature from 1952, a giddy look at New York journalism in the 1880s, was his personal favorite—he financed it himself and lost every penny. A principled cigar smoker (Gene Evans) becomes the hard-hitting editor of a new Manhattan daily, where he competes with his former employer (Mary Welch) in a grudge match loaded with sexual undertones; meanwhile a man jumps off the Brooklyn Bridge trying to become famous, the Statue of Liberty is given to the U.S. by France, and a newspaper drive raises money for its pedestal. Enthusiasm flows into every nook and cranny of this cozy movie: when violence breaks out in the cramped-looking set of the title street, the camera weaves in and out of the buildings as through they were a sports arena, in a single take. "Park Row" is repeated incessantly like a crazy mantra, and the overall fervor of this vest-pocket *Citizen Kane* makes journalism sound like the most exciting activity in the world. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 183 min. Sat 1/18, 6 PM. Filmfront

RR Undeterred

"People still cross. They are undeterred." Direc-

tor Eva Lewis takes a unique approach to the national debate over immigration in the documentary *Undeterred*, which follows residents in an Arizona border town after a "temporary" border patrol checkpoint becomes seemingly permanent. The setting is Arivaca, Arizona, an unincorporated community just 11 miles north of the Mexico border. Border communities are often the forgotten voice in the conversation on immigration, but *Undeterred* shines thanks to its characters who are each compassionate everymen, people who just want their community back to normal. The film chronicles stories of detainments, unlawful searches, intimidation, profiling, deaths, and more as migrants cross from Mexico to the United States, all while Arivaca residents push back against the increasingly militarized police presence. The film remembers to celebrate the small wins too, ending with a message of hope despite its sometimes overwhelming bleakness. In English and Spanish with subtitles. —**NOËLLE D. LILLEY** 76 min. Sat 1/18, 7 PM. Chicago Filmmakers

RR What She Said: The Art of Pauline Kael

I've often wondered what people depicted in documentaries think about the end result, but this was the first time I wondered what a film subject might've written in a review. *What She Said: The Art of Pauline Kael* profiles the legendary film critic who came into her trade by happenstance and wound up redefining the craft. The film explores how the California native honed her chops over nearly two decades before landing a job at the *New Yorker* in 1968, where she eschewed the stuffy tone of elitist "gentlemen critics" (as she called them) for something more conversational and passionate. But though her prose reflected her perspective as an everyday moviegoer, she remained un beholden to popular taste or commercial interests, deriding films she felt manipulated viewers, and championing innovation and emerging talent. *What She Said* arrives at an interesting time in popular discourse concerning the role of the critic, and it offers plenty of insight on that topic as well as wisdom for any writer striving to develop their voice and achieve excellence on their terms. —**JAMIE LUDWIG** 98 min. Gene Siskel Film Center

ALSO PLAYING

The Graduates/Los Graduados

Bernardo Ruiz's documentary about issues in education, as seen by several Latinx adolescents from across the United States. Eve Ewing leads a discussion with Ruiz following the screening, which kicks off Cinema 53's winter screening and discussion series, Race and American Schools. 106 min. Thu 1/23, 7 PM. Harper Theater

Hot Doug's: The Movie

Christopher Markos's documentary looks at the last days and unique appeal of the title hot dog place in Chicago. Q&A with filmmakers Christopher and Nicholas Markos follows the screening. 64 min. Thu 1/23, 6 PM. Independence Library

Rage and Glory

The story of the Stern Gang, the group of Zionists who initiated a guerrilla war against the British commission in Palestine during World War II. Avi Nesher directed; with Guiliano Mar, Rona Freed, and Roni Pinkovitch. Mon 1/20, 7 PM. Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation



Verboten during their short existence in the early 80s: Zack Kantor, Chris Kean, Jason Narducy, and Tracey Bradford
© COURTESY PITCH PERFECT PR

What turns Kids Punk?

The new musical *Verboten* uses the story of Jason Narducy's forgotten early-80s band to talk about the power of subculture.

By LEOR GALIL

In fall 2014, Evanston-based playwright Brett Neveu was watching the first episode of the Foo Fighters' HBO miniseries, *Sonic Highways*, when he was surprised to see a new acquaintance interviewed onscreen. Neveu had met musician Jason Narducy a couple months earlier at Narducy's Evanston home; their children went to the same elementary school, and Neveu had volunteered to work with Narducy's wife, Emily Steadman, on a PTA fund-raiser.

"He just came walking up the stairs from his practice space," Neveu says. "I'd been in bands

for 20 years, and if a guy has a practice space in his basement, I think it's pretty awesome." When Neveu went home after that visit, he listened to Split Single, a power-pop solo project Narducy launched in 2012 and whose recordings have been filled out by the likes of Wilco bassist John Stirratt, Superchunk drummer Jon Wurster, and Spoon front man Britt Daniel. He was impressed by the music, not just by the star-studded roster, and when he saw Narducy again on TV, he had an idea: within a week, he'd asked his new friend for permission to write a musical about him.

Narducy, 48, has built a remarkable rock pedigree over the past 25 years. In the early 90s, he teamed up with cellist Alison Chesley (who now performs as Helen Money) to form the acoustic indie-rock duo Jason & Alison. After releasing 1994's *Woodshed* on local label Whitehouse, they turned their duo into a four-piece, christened it Verbow, and signed to Epic. Their 1997 major-label debut, *Chronicles*, was produced by punk elder Bob Mould. Verbow broke up in 2003, and two years later Mould invited Narducy to play bass in his band, which also includes Wurster on drums—a gig that's lasted almost

15 years so far. When Superchunk bassist Laura Ballance announced in 2013 that she could no longer play live because she suffered from a hearing disorder called hyperacusis, the band hired Narducy as their touring bassist. He's a rocker's rocker, respected for his sharp songwriting skills and expert musicianship.

But none of that is why Dave Grohl interviewed Narducy for *Sonic Highways*. The series documents the Foo Fighters recording eight songs in eight different cities for their eighth album, also titled *Sonic Highways*. In a voice-over that opens the series, Grohl says that this

1/16-3/8: Thu-Fri 8 PM, Sat 3 and 8 PM, Sun 3 PM, Chopin Theatre,
1543 W. Division, 773-769-3832, thehousetheatre.com, \$20-\$50, 12+

VERBÖTEN

MUSIC



The *Verböten* version of *Verböten* at SPACE in December 2019: Matthew Lunt, Jeff Kurysz (on drums), Kieran McCabe, and Krystal Ortiz. AUDREY PALUMBO

conceit provided the band with a creative challenge—they hoped to make music that spoke to the history of each city, taking inspiration at every stop from artists important to their members or to the culture at large (if not both). Grohl also interviewed musicians, producers, and other experts about the musical DNA of the eight cities, which often meant digging into his own past. In Chicago, for instance, where the series starts, Grohl went to his first concert in summer 1982. A teenage cousin, Tracey Bradford, took him to the Cubby Bear to see *Rights of the Accused* and *Naked Raygun*. Bradford also introduced Grohl to a punk band she'd started earlier that year with a few friends: they were called *Verböten*, and their youngest member was 11-year-old guitarist Jason Narducy.

Verböten opened Grohl's eyes to the reality that he could create his own kind of music, and he's talked about them publicly at least as far back as a 1996 *Tribune* interview with Greg Kot. But *Sonic Highways* brought the teen punk band to a whole new audience—including Neveu. He'd grown up a half hour outside Des Moines in Newton, Iowa, and moved to Chicago in his 20s, where he broke into the theater scene in the mid-90s with crass, fringy puppet shows. By the time he moved to Los Angeles in 2007, he'd become a prolific and successful playwright, known for dark stage shows under-

scored with quick wit—he'd already been hired by London's Royal Court Theatre, New York's Manhattan Theatre Club, and Chicago's Steppenwolf and Goodman theaters. Neveu moved back here in 2012 to take a teaching position at Northwestern, which he juggles with stage plays and TV screenplays at various stages of development. For the past five years or so, one of those scripts has been for *Verböten*, inspired by the footage he'd seen on HBO of a preteen Narducy playing in a short-lived punk band.

As Neveu developed a story about four kids navigating their messy lives while preparing for their big show at the Cubby Bear, Narducy got involved writing the music, giving *Verböten* an early-80s punk edge (something that could improve a lot of musicals). The script is heavily fictionalized, but the real *Verböten* were also using the band to work through the hardships of growing up. "My ability to play guitar and write songs gave me power and self-worth," Narducy says. "I was proud of my band. I think we all were, and we all found a sense of identity by being in our little gang. Beyond the confidence gained from creating songs and playing them, thanks to Tracey, we were also accepted into a community. It felt good to be welcomed by teenage punk musicians and fans."

Narducy's dad was big into music, but not into his music. "Rock was a huge part of our



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11am - 2pm
Kehrein Center for the Arts
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Bus Ride to Women's March Chicago

January 18
9am - 3pm
Ogden Mall
1271 E. Ogden Ave.
Naperville, IL

Fox Valley Illinois Women's March

January 18
12pm - 1pm
Downtown Geneva
100 S. 3rd St.
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Women's March Chicago 2020

January 18
11am - 1pm
Grant Park

ACE January Meeting-Report: One Year in Office

January 19
2:30pm - 4:30pm
Community Room,
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Naperville, IL

MLK Day 2020: My Dream My Chicago

January 20
10am - 2pm
Heartland Alliance
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Martin Luther King Jr. Day Panel

January 20
2pm - 4pm
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
1100 E. 55th St.

Impact of the 2020 Census: Collections, Concerns, Changes

January 21
5:30pm - 7pm
Union League Club of Chicago
65 W. Jackson Blvd.

Roe Vs. Wade Anniversary Event

January 23
5:30pm - 9pm
Morgan Manufacturing
401 N. Morgan St.

Candidate Forum: US House of Representatives IL1

January 23
7:30pm - 9pm
First Unitarian Church of Chicago
5650 S. Woodlawn Ave.

The 1619 Project with Nikole Hannah-Jones

January 27
6:30pm - 8pm
Venue SIX10
610 S. Michigan Ave.

How to be an Antiracist

January 28
6pm - 7:30pm
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Jason Narducy (right) shares the stage at SPACE with Kieran McCabe, who plays him in *Verböten*.

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household and our world, but punk rock was *mine*,” he says. “That was something that he didn’t understand, and every kid wants to find that thing that their parents don’t understand. Punk rock was that for us.”

Verböten debuts at the Chopin Theatre on Thursday, January 16, and runs through early March. The show has also awakened the real-life *Verböten*: though the band didn’t put out any music before breaking up in 1983, they did make a few professional recordings, and this week they’re finally releasing them as their self-titled debut EP. They’ll have seven-inches for sale at the Chopin on opening night.

To understand what made *Verböten* unique requires a little knowledge of early Chicago punk history. In the late

70s, when London, New York, and Los Angeles seemed to be generating definitive punk bands faster than Malcolm McLaren generated bullshit, Chicago supposedly had no scene to speak of—though the people who say that tend to be the same people who eventually gave it one, as small and isolated as it was.

The first nucleus for Chicago’s scene was north-side gay bar La Mere Vipere, which in spring 1977 started hosting punk dance parties where DJs spun imported seven-inches. After La Mere mysteriously burned down the following year, the scene dispersed to several clubs, including O’Banions, Oz, and later Club C.O.D. and the Cubby Bear. They played host to a growing but still tiny network of Chicago bands, among them stupid-like-a-fox smart asses Tutu & the Pirates, prickly antagonists Silver

MUSIC



Chris Kean and Tracey Bradford during a brief partial Verböten reunion at SPACE, more than 36 years after the band broke up

© COURTESY PITCH PERFECT PR

Abuse, and dark postpunks Da. Outside the clubs they had a champion in Terry Nelson, who broadcast their music on Northeastern Illinois University's free-form radio station, WZRD. He also managed Da and co-owned Autumn Records, which in 1981 put out definitive early Chicago punk compilation *Busted at Oz*—it's the first release to feature music by the era's most celebrated band, Naked Raygun.

Even in the early 80s, punk only barely existed in Chicago, with bands struggling to find even a couple regular venues. But the scene's signal did reach the north suburbs. Verböten bassist Chris Kean got a taste for punk from the LPs that came into Evanston shop Record Exchange, then managed by future Shake, Rattle & Read proprietor Ric Addy. To find punk shows, he'd consult the *Reader*. "That was local for us—there was *Maximum RocknRoll* and *Flipside*, there was other things, but the *Reader* was the first place where we found out about all the stuff," Kean says.

To find bandmates, Kean didn't have to look far. He lived in the same Evanston apartment building as drummer Zack Kantor. Shortly before Verböten formed in early 1982, Kean met Narducy on a nearby basketball court. They lived a couple blocks apart, and after Narducy told Kean he was learning to play guitar, Kean invited him to his apartment to check out his

brother's gear. Kean also extended an invitation to Kantor, who was just picking up the drums. "I remember some of the first times I started playing with Zack, he would set up cardboard boxes and just play cardboard," Narducy says. As a trio, the youngsters didn't go further than playing short sets for parties that Kean and Kantor's parents threw—until they met Bradford.

Narducy's father had gotten him a scholarship to an Evanston college preparatory called Roycemore School, which his family wouldn't otherwise have been able to afford (his parents had divorced when he was four). There he met Bradford, four years his senior. "When I was 11 years old, you could walk into a schoolroom and find your people based on their clothing—like, 'Oh, there's the goth kids, there's the punk-rock kids,'" Narducy says. "It was easy to find your people, and Tracey was that. She dressed the part and was all in." So were Narducy, Kean, and Kantor, once Bradford joined the band. Narducy doesn't remember if they'd even had a name before, but when they became a four-piece, they became Verböten.

Bradford had already made crucial connections in the Chicago punk scene, which gave the group opportunities that weren't available to any other local band with a preteen guitarist. In January 1983, Verböten opened for Rights of the Accused and Naked Raygun at the Cubby Bear. Narducy's dad was there to capture it on his camcorder.

"How does something like that happen? Well, it's Tracey," Narducy says. "Everybody fell in love with Tracey. She was just this lightning bolt, and opened a lot of doors for us."

Verböten also played basement parties, a dance at Roycemore, and a battle of the bands at New Trier overloaded with Rush cover bands. "I know there was one gig where I was grounded, and Jay [Yuenger] from Rights of the Accused, who went on to be in White Zombie, sat in for me," Narducy says. Their highest-profile gig was in May 1983, when they appeared on a local Saturday morning children's TV show called *Kidding Around*.

Kantor's dad wanted to get his son's band on the show, so he booked a two-hour session for them at Evanston's Studiomedica Recording Company—Verböten needed something presentable on tape to submit to the program's producers. "He told us, 'You can record four songs,'" Narducy says. "We combined two songs so that we sort of recorded five. There's a song called 'Work' and a song called 'Let It Out,' and we called it 'Work to Let It Out.' It's hilarious, 'cause it just totally stops in the middle and starts another song."



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MUSIC

Unfortunately, Verböten broke up early in 1983, even before they appeared on *Kidding Around*. The band members and their families had gathered at Kantor's apartment to talk about Verböten's future. "Tracey, at this point, was 16—she was like, 'We need to release a 45 with the songs we have recorded, get in a van, and tour,'" Narducy says. "I was 12. And my dad said, 'No. Jason's gonna finish sixth grade.'" The band didn't practice again, and only regrouped for the TV performance. "The interviewer asked me, 'So are you guys gonna do more gigs?' And I think I said, 'Yeah, if things turn out right,'" Narducy says. "It just kind of fell apart, but there were no hard feelings."

In the musical *Verböten*, fictionalized versions of Kantor, Kean, Bradford, and Narducy deal with teen angst, alcoholism, domestic violence, youthful insecurity, divorce, and clueless parents, all while trying to hold it together in band practice and make it to their gig. It's similar to the direction that Narducy initially proposed when Neveu asked to make a musical about Verböten.

"I suggested to him not trying to tell an audience what punk rock was like in 1983—so many TV commercials try to do that and fail, and it's been co-opted," Narducy says. "I felt like there was a better story in 'Why did these kids from Evanston form a band, and why did they play punk rock?' Our friends didn't understand punk rock—we weren't impressing our friends with this. People didn't get famous playing punk rock in 1983. What drew these four people together, who are still great friends?"

Kean and Kantor still live in Evanston—Kean's house is close to Neveu's—which meant that once Narducy gave his approval, it was easy for all three to meet with Neveu at Prairie Moon (Bradford lives in Florida). Once Neveu got the band members' stories and secured their life rights, he set off to write the script—and while revising drafts and workshopping the story, he ended up considering his own past. "It's a little bit of a 'going back in time' fantasy for me—that I could be there for the incubation of something dynamic that I wish I could've been a part of when I was Jason's age at the time," Neveu says. "That's the great thing about creating these sort of pieces—the 'what if' factor. I can insert myself that way, and that helps too."

In 2011, House Theatre of Chicago had staged a play of Neveu's called *Odradek* at the Chopin, and he figured the same company and venue would work well with his punk musical. "The characters all need to play instruments, and I'd

seen a lot of shows where that had happened over there,” Neveu says. “The Chopin, it looks like some place you might go see a punk show back in the day.” Neveu also has two decades of history with House artistic director Nathan Allen—who not only said yes to the show but also came on to direct.

Neveu had known Narducy could write great songs for a musical from the first time he listened to Split Single. “He does something that works so well with a musical,” Neveu says. “That clarity of intention when it comes to his lyrics, clarity of emotion—getting on the inside of the character he’s playing when he’s singing. And also his heart’s on his sleeve when he’s writing.” In his first draft, Neveu left space for Narducy to insert his music, and suggested bands whose work could provide the tone for a scene. The rest he left to Narducy.

“My goal was to have the songs the kids play be punk-rock songs that are influenced by ‘83,” Narducy says. “Anybody who’s familiar with that music will be like, ‘OK, that sounds like Articles of Faith, that one’s Naked Raygun, that one’s the Ramones, Circle Jerks.’ People who are familiar with that era will hear my points

of reference with those songs.” The melodic, brooding ripper “I’m Not Coming Home” not only taps into the punk era’s sound and energy but also achieves the kind of larger-than-life expression that’s baked into musical theater. When writing music for the band members’ parents and siblings, Narducy drew on 60s and 70s rock, which he says balances out the punk fury.

When it came time to cast the show, House Theatre chose an actor named Kieran McCabe to play Narducy. “The audition was basically, like, ‘Come in and show us how you rock and how you lose yourself in the music,’” McCabe says. He played the Against Me! song “Black Me Out.” While working on *Verböten*, McCabe talked to Narducy about what he’d been through and tapped into his own experience figuring out music and friendship in his high school band. The two of them have become friends, and when Superchunk played SPACE in Evanston this past summer, Narducy put McCabe on the guest list.

Narducy and Neveu have gotten close as well. Neveu says the musical nearly fell apart four times, but working with Narducy helped

him see *Verböten* through to the stage. “It’s for Jason,” Neveu says. “And the rest of the band too. But the guy is a hero of mine. As a young kid, and also as a friend.”

The *Verböten* cast began learning the music this past fall, with Narducy guiding them through the tougher passages. Once they had a handle on the material, the actors decided they wanted to play a concert of the songs from the musical. Narducy got them a gig at SPACE on Monday, December 9, and played with the band-slash-cast throughout the night. “That made me feel so much more confident in myself,” McCabe says. “That was the first time I played electric guitar in front of people. And to share the stage with Jason, that was awesome. We didn’t shred back-to-back, but it felt that way.”

Bradford flew in for the occasion, and she and Kean joined Narducy onstage for a partial *Verböten* reunion. They played three songs, which took less than five minutes. “I was nervous—it’s been a long time since I performed in front of people,” Kean says. “I screwed up the first song, but Jason saved the day.” Kean reg-

ularly takes his two sons to see Nora O’Connor perform—she’s a member of the Flat Five as well as a close collaborator with the Decemberists, Iron & Wine, and Neko Case, and she’s his wife and the kids’ mother. At SPACE the tables were turned: O’Connor brought their sons to see Kean. “They had never known me to be a performer,” he says. “They got a kick out of watching me thrash the bass for a few minutes. It’s quite clear who the talented musician in the family is—quite clear.”

For Kean, the renewed interest in *Verböten* and the mounting of a musical inspired by their story have felt surreal. When he started the band, it meant nothing to anyone outside the small Chicago punk scene, despite the lasting, life-changing effect it had on all four members. “I’ve always been proud of what we did in *Verböten*,” Kean says. “I still have my bass, I still have our recordings, and I have a couple gig flyers. It was the highlight of my musical career, which is kind of funny—that I peaked when I was 12. That’s very cool. I’m very comfortable with that.” **R**

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Yuna sings and lives by her own bold rules



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YUNA

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MALAYSIAN SINGER-SONGWRITER YUNA (Yunalis Zara'ai) is a fashion icon as well as a pop and R&B sensation, with a personal style she describes as inspired by Audrey Hepburn and 90s Gwen Stefani. Aspects of her music bring both those icons to mind, and she also sounds a bit like Sade in the way her delightful, breathy voice and casually elegant phrasing glide over sultry grooves. Born in Kedah in 1986 and raised in Kuala Lumpur, Yuna now divides her time between her homeland and Los Angeles. She began singing at seven and taught herself guitar at 19, while she was in law school—the same year she auditioned and competed on *One in a Million*, a Malaysian show akin to *American Idol*. She was eliminated in the top 40 round, but rather than get discouraged, Yuna began sharing her songs via MySpace. Her 2008 self-titled EP debut became a breakout hit and earned her

four Malaysian Music Awards, and though she finished her law degree in 2009, she decided to forgo that career path to pursue music in the States. Yuna's 2011 EP *Decorate* and her 2012 self-titled U.S. debut both feature tracks produced by Pharrell Williams. She began by playing laid-back, breezy folk-pop grooves backed by her guitar and ukulele, but with each new album she moves further away from that style to forge her own brand of global pop—though it's rooted in contemporary R&B, it also carries nuances from her homeland. Her 2019 album, *Rouge*, continues this evolution, and explicitly references the lovely classical sung poetry called *syair*. She starts “Forevermore” with melodic humming backed by a traditional Malay *kompang* hand drum, and on album closer “Tiada Akhir” (a heartbreak story in *syair* form) she sings in Malay for the first time on an international release. She also expands

the musical palette of the smoky, simmering R&B sounds she introduced on 2016's *Chapters*: “Blank Marquee” is a funky bop with touches of Prince, and “Pink Youth” is a feminist empowerment song rife with disco beats. As she declares in the retro-soul choruses of “Likes,” she's reclaiming her time—she's done with haters, whether they bemoan her stepping out of traditional Malaysian Muslim culture (“Oh, she Muslim / Why she singin' onstage? She's showing her neck in public?”) or show their ignorance and bigotry with spiteful complaints (“Who does she think she is? / What is that on her head?”). Yuna chose the title *Rouge*, a color she previously considered too bold for her to wear, to symbolize her current outlook. In “Likes” she sings, “I got the music and faith in me . . . and I ain't livin' by nobody's rules.” —CATALINA MARIA JOHNSON

THURSDAY 16

DAVIS *Part of the Tomorrow Never Knows festival. Lala Lala headlines; Nnamdi, Sen Morimoto, Davis, and Lucy open. 9 PM, Sleeping Village, 3734 W. Belmont, sold out. 21+*

Davis Blackwell began rapping in June 2018 and got involved in the Chicago music scene in no time. Shortly after he first picked up the mike, he formed the duo UdaBaby with Joshua Virtue; last year they cofounded local label and collective Why? Records with MCs Malci and Ruby Watson. Why? has become a force in underground Chicago hip-hop, dropping six captivating albums and EPs in the past calendar year, including Blackwell's solo debut, September's *Green Parakeet Suite*. Blackwell records as Davis, but Spotify has filed GPS under one of his nicknames, the Dorchester Bully. He references that name in his songs—along with one of his other identities, the Stony Island Stalker—though he tears through his meaty bars so fast you can be forgiven for not catching either. Blackwell gets into the DNA of his words and figures out how to make each one pop, bounce, or slide, depending on how he feels at a given moment, and this helps animate the snapshot narratives he packs into his brief songs—only one track on GPS even comes close to three minutes. For those not familiar with Blackwell's corner of the DIY scene, a couple lines from “Baby Teeth” provides illuminating clues: “Spend it all investing in our community / Then we rock ‘Praise Art’ baseball caps and pristine Sharkula hoodies.” Whether or not you're familiar with the motto “Praise Art” or the person who popularized it in the local scene (that'd be Sex No Babies front man Rahim Salaam), Blackwell delivers his references with the kind of care that'll make you want to spend time in his world. —LEOR GALIL

LEVIN BROTHERS *Grape Juice Plus opens. 7:30 PM, Bananna's Comedy Shack at Reggies' Music Joint (second floor), 2105 S. State, \$30. 21+*

Many know the lore of prog bass lord Tony Levin, legendary for his active fretwork with King Crimson, Peter Gabriel, and other artsy UK acts. Lately I've been paying more attention to his diverse but less famous early session work, which includes spots on key LPs by Carly Simon, Judy Collins, Lou Reed (he's on the dark, minimal *Berlin*), and doomed singer-songwriter Tim Hardin—all of which required a very different tone than the high-tech Chapman Stick bass that's most associated with Levin. The man clearly has range, and he illustrates it again in his latest project, the Levin Brothers—a jazz band he and his brother, keyboardist Pete Levin, formed in 2014. It's tempting to file Pete in the “lesser known and less talented brother” category, alongside Chris Jagger and Mike McCartney, but he's had an illustrious career of his own, gigging with the likes of Miles Davis, Gil Evans, Dave Brubeck, Freddie Hubbard, Charles Mingus, Jaco Pastorius, and Wayne Short-



Origami Angel © COURTESY THE ARTIST

er. Raised in the Boston suburbs, the brothers were trained in classical music (initially Pete played French horn and Tony double bass) and developed a taste for 50s jazz. As the Levin Brothers, a band they call a “return home,” they’ve recorded a self-titled debut album in 2014 and the live record *Special Delivery* in 2017. The lineup on the first LP also features drummer Jeff Siegel (sideman to Ron Carter, Jack DeJohnette, and Mose Allison), saxophonist Erik Lawrence (who’s played with Levon Helm, Buddy Miles, Chico Hamilton, and the Spin Doctors), and guest guitarist David Spinozza (who collaborated with every Beatle but George in the 70s and worked in the *Saturday Night Live* band from 1980 till ‘82). In the studio and onstage, the extremely tight combo bop through their own compositions and take on pieces by soundtrack god Ennio Morricone, tango master Astor Piazzolla, and perhaps inevitably King Crimson (“Matte Kudasai”). The musical quirks associated with both Levin brothers remain in full effect, though: while they maintain a mostly traditional jazz sound and unfold their solos tastefully, they filter everything through complex time signatures, and Tony’s deft playing and tone veer close to fusion territory. For this tour, the Levin Brothers are a quartet, with Siegel and guitarist Jeff Ciampa. —STEVE KRAKOW

ORIGAMI ANGEL *Mt. Pocono headlines; Origami Angel, Short Fictions, and Lettering open. 7:30 PM, Beat Kitchen, 2100 W. Belmont, \$10. 17+*

Emo’s fourth wave re-energized indie rock in the 2010s, but by the end of the decade many of the genre’s most promising bands had quietly broken up or seemed about to, playing only the occasional show with no sign that they would make more music. But the era last-

ed long enough to ensure the emo of the new decade would be in good hands—hands like those of D.C. band Origami Angel. Guitarist-vocalist Ryland Heagy and drummer Pat Doherty got the idea to form a two-piece after catching a set from young fourth-wave emo duo the Obsessives. As Origami Angel have figured out their rambunctious, progressive style over the past few years, they’ve also built a network of like-minded emo misfits from their hometown (such as Commander Salamander) and others they’ve found through Twitter and Reddit (including Iowa’s Stars Hollow and North Carolina’s Jail Socks). The knowledge, confidence, and support that have come out of those relationships helped Heagy and Doherty develop, and in turn Origami Angel have become a boon to the rest of the scene. Their debut album, November’s *Somewhere City* (Chatterbox), is one of the best emo albums of 2019, which is no faint praise in a year that also gifted us with a rare crossover emo record that actually won over critics (Oso Oso’s *Basking in the Glow*) and an ambitious acid-trip rock opera (Prince Daddy & the Hyena’s *Cosmic Thrill Seekers*). Heagy and Doherty use their instrumental skills to work flamboyant, sometimes playful parts into neat, hook-filled songs, lending emotional resonance to what might otherwise seem like merely athletic displays. On “24 Hr Drive-Thru,” Heagy punctuates harmonized blocks of chanted vocals with quick hammer-ons to make a song about the small joy of late-night drives to fast-food joints feel full of possibilities. —LEOR GALIL

SAMOHT *Devin Tracy opens. 8 PM, Promontory, 5311 S. Lake Park Ave. West, \$25-\$50. 21+*

New York R&B singer Samoht knows how to draw listeners in by draping his luxurious voice all over lava-lamp instrumentals. Keeping them engaged is the challenge. A few too many tracks on Samoht’s 2019 album, *Exit* (Mxxn Wave), slug- ➔

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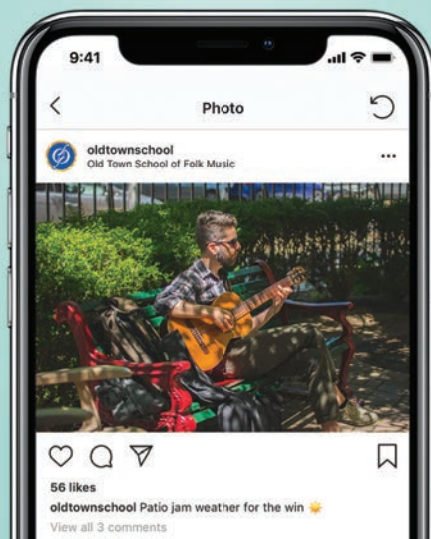
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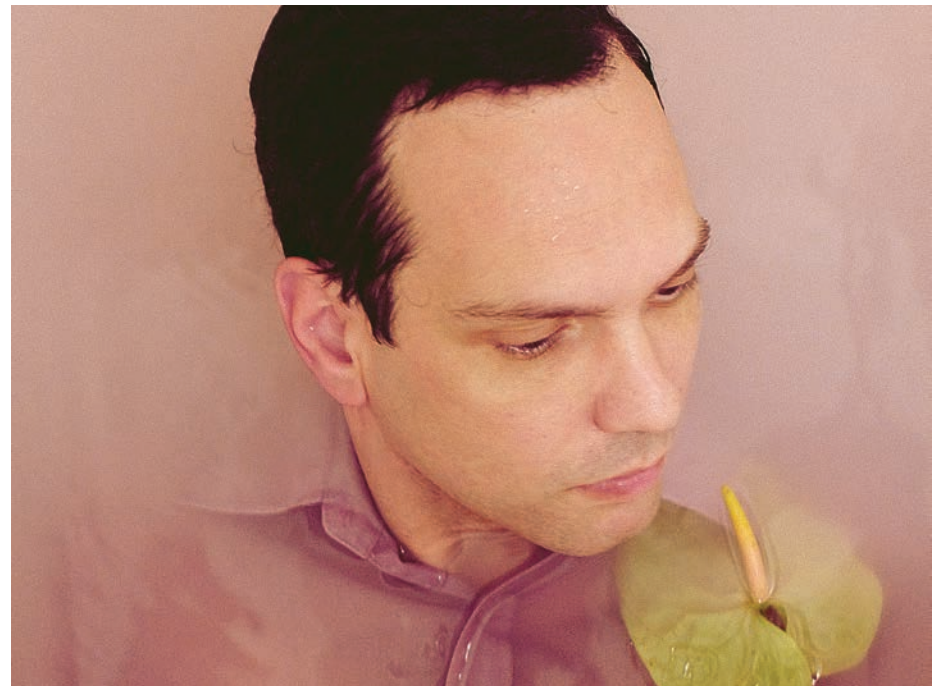
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Chris Stewart of Black Marble COURTESY THE ARTIST

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gishly disintegrate into the ether, no matter how captivating his vocal twists and turns get. But when his songwriting is as strong as his singing, he sounds like he's found the key to pop music's future. On "Reason," Samoht conjures an otherworldly vibe by playing minimal field recordings in reverse over thin boom-bap percussion, then tastefully overdubs his soaring vocals throughout to really make the song shine. —LEOR GALIL

FRIDAY17

YUNA See *Pick of the Week*, page 28. See also *Saturday*. 8 PM, City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph, \$35-55.

SATURDAY18

BLACK MARBLE Part of the *Tomorrow Never Knows* festival. *Hoops and Varsity* open. 8 PM, Metro, 3730 N. Clark, \$21, \$19 in advance. 18+

With this summer's *Bigger Than Life* (Sacred Bones), Black Marble has finally given in and made a pop record. Born in Brooklyn and now based in Los Angeles, this darkwave act began in 2012 as the bleak, gothy duo of Chris Stewart and Ty Kube, but by 2016, when Stewart moved west and released Black Marble's second album, *It's Immaterial*, it had become his solo project. Perhaps the huge departure he makes on *Bigger Than Life* can be chalked up to his three years of Cali sun. The album's electronic rhythms are still steeped in dank New York cool, but its bouncy synths and yearning vocals shed the gloom of Black Mar-

ble's previous releases and lean into heartwarming nostalgia and borderline cheeriness. Adding to the songs' timeless warm 'n' fuzzy quality, they almost sound like they're coming out of a sticky FM radio. *Bigger Than Life* finds joy in darkwave's inherent sadness and moving depth in its bare simplicity, and that's a feat for a genre that sometimes feels like it's already done everything it could possibly do. —LUCA CIMARUSTI

PAN-AMERICAN *Cleared* opens. 7:30 PM, International Museum of Surgical Science, 1524 N. Lake Shore Dr., \$20. 21+

When singer and musician Mark Nelson began Pan-American in 1997, he was looking for an outlet for all the things he wanted to do outside of his main group at the time, Labradford. The project has proved quite flexible: Pan-American has released records of digital dub, atmospheric vocal numbers featuring members of Low, and electronic instrumentals played by a group that also included multi-instrumentalist Robert Donne and drummer Steven Hess. Though the project laid dormant while Nelson collaborated with Donne in the more frankly experimental Anjou (and during years when Nelson's music making took a back seat to raising a family), he's recently brought Pan-American back as a solo endeavor, with a renewed focus on stringed instruments. In August he released *Nightbirds*, a 17-minute single-song digital EP that uses layered loops of lap-steel guitar to evoke a nocturnal ambience, on Australia's Longform Editions label. And in November the formerly Chicago-based Kranky label, whose first release was Labradford's debut album, put out the first Pan-American LP in six years. *A Son* includes spacy pieces for hammered dulcimer, guitar instrumentals that update the dreamy ➔

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- 2/3 The Motels, Bow Wow Wow, When In Rome II
- 2/7 Badfish w/Little Stranger
- 2/8 Sixteen Candles
- 2/9 Jacquees
- 2/27 Who's Bad 2020 - Evolution Of Pop
- 3/4 Cult of Luna w/Emma Ruth Rundle, Intronaut
- 3/5 We Came As Romans, The Devils Wears Prada, Dayseeker
- 3/12 ZZ Ward w/Patrick Droney
- 3/14 Gaelic Storm 3/14 Gaelic Storm
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Heilung RUBEN TERLOUW

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vibes of Santo & Johnny, and songs that use Nelson's private touchstones—"Little Walter, Ivory Joe Hunter" takes its title from a line by a character in *The Rockford Files* lamenting the theft of his record collection, and "Brewthru" name-checks a convenience chain from Virginia's Outer Banks—to mull over transition and loss. This is the first local Pan-American appearance since 2018, and Nelson will perform solo. Chicago duo Cleared, aka guitarist and electronicist Michael Vallera and former Pan-American drummer Steven Hess, open the show. —**BILL MEYER**

YUNA See *Pick of the Week*, page 28. See also Friday, 7 and 10 PM, City Winery, 1200 W. Randolph, \$35-55.

SUNDAY19

ALL GET OUT Almost headlines; *All Get Out*, *Ghost Atlas*, and *Rowdy* open. 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, 1375 W. Lake, \$18. 17+

For emo-rock outfit All Get Out, the 2010s were a turbulent decade. Originally from Charleston, South Carolina, the band made their breakthrough in 2011 with their second full-length, *The Season*, before relocating to Texas, where it took them five years to put out their follow-up, 2016's *Nobody Likes a Quitter* (Bad Timing). Though it was a little less raucous than their earlier releases, it was full of harmony-driven indie bangers. The band released *No Bouquet* (Equal Vision) in 2018, which complements the light southern accent of front man Nathan Hussey with new layers of Americana influence and charm, thanks to Kyle Samuel's lap steel and baritone guitar. Hussey explores his vulnerabilities in the band's songs of life, love, change, and self-doubt, and they're on full display on standout tracks "Survive," and "God Damn." Hussey has moved to

Northport, Alabama, and the group borrowed the name of his new home for the title of their latest EP, July's *The Northport Sessions*, which contains a tender, percussion-free ballad, "Northport," as well as stripped-back versions of four *No Bouquet* songs. Live, though, you can expect All Get Out to focus on their jangly, noisy rock 'n' roll riffs, which they pair with minor-key melodies and anthemic choruses while Hussey alternates between delicate singing and trembling yowls. If you're a fan of mature, old-school emo and hook-driven indie rock, this show ought to hit the spot.

—**SCOTT MORROW**

MONDAY20

HEILUNG 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, 4746 N. Racine, sold out.

The band Heilung (German for "healing") are sometimes described as experimental folk; they themselves call their sound "amplified history." Either way, they are thundering Viking hippie nerds. Band founder Kai Uwe Faust is a German tattoo artist who specializes in Old Norse imagery, and who has cultivated a throat-singing vocal style similar to that of traditional Mongolian or Tuvan performers. In Heilung, he joins forces with Danish producer Christian Juul and Norwegian vocalist Maria Franz. Onstage the group wear elaborate Iron Age-influenced costumes (including, inevitably, horns), sing lyrics derived from the inscriptions on swords and other historical artifacts, and play instruments such as ritual bells, bones, a horse-skin drum painted with human blood, and a clay rattle made with human ashes. Their 2019 album *Futha* places a greater emphasis on Franz's singing than earlier efforts, but other elements of their sound are still in place: chanting vocals, heavy percussion, and rumbling drones are interrupted by ominously whispered passages of poetry in Old Norse and other atavistic tongues. The sound combines the bombast of power metal and the witchery of ➔

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THE SECRET HISTORY OF CHICAGO MUSIC

PIVOTAL CHICAGO MUSICIANS THAT SOMEHOW HAVE NOT GOTTEN THEIR JUST DUES BY PLASTIC CRIMEWAVE



George Wild Child Butler

WINTER BLUES

BLUES HARPISIT & SINGER GEORGE "WILD CHILD" BUTLER WAS BORN OCTOBER 2, 1936, IN AUTAUGAVILLE, ALABAMA, THE YOUNGEST OF NINE CHILDREN. A STUBBORNLY IDIO-SYNCRATIC PLAYER WITH A RICH, GROWLING BARITONE VOICE, HE PLAYED RAW, OLD-FASHIONED BLUES, BUT RATHER THAN RELY ON STANDARDS HE WROTE MANY OF HIS OWN SONGS. HIS SHARECROPPER MOTHER GAVE YOUNG GEORGE HIS NICKNAME: BY AGE 5 HE WAS SINGING AT FAMILY PARTIES, WHERE HE'D CRAWL ON THE FLOOR PULLING ON LADIES' SKIRTS. AT AGE 12, BUTLER MADE HIS FIRST HARMONICA OUT OF A PRINCE ALBERT TOBACCO CAN, AND BECAUSE HE TAUGHT HIMSELF, FOR HIS WHOLE LIFE HE PLAYED THE INSTRUMENT UPSIDE-DOWN. HE SETTLED IN CHICAGO IN THE MID-50S AND STARTED GIGGING, SOMETIMES AS FAR AFIELD AS DETROIT (WITH LEGENDS LIKE JOHN LEE HOOKER AND SONNY BOY WILLIAMSON II) AND ALABAMA. BUTLER CUT HIS FIRST SINGLES IN THE 1960S FOR SOUTHERN LABELS SHARP & JEWEL, OFTEN RECORDING IN CHICAGO, WHERE HE WAS BACKED BY HEAVY HITTERS SUCH AS JIMMY DAWKINS, CASH MCCALL, AND

BLUES GODFATHER WILLIE DIXON (WHO PRODUCED MANY OF THE SIDES) DIXON TOLD BUTLER, "YOU ARE THE MOAN OF THE SUFFERING WOMAN, THE GROWL OF THE DYING MAN. YOU AIN'T NOTHING BUT THE BLUES." BUTLER ALSO RECORDED FOR CHESS IN THE LATE 60S, BUT IT LICENSED THE SESSIONS AND THEY LANGUISHED TILL 1985, WHEN CHARLY RECORDS PUT OUT "OPEN UP BABY." DESPITE HIS BAD LUCK WITH RECORDINGS, BUTLER DID WELL AS A PERFORMER, TOURING TEXAS AND LOUISIANA AND WORKING AS A SIDEMAN FOR LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS. HE ALSO KEPT MAKING LPS, INCLUDING 1969'S "KEEP ON DOING WHAT YOU'RE DOING" AND 1976'S "FUNKY BUTT LOVER." HE TRIED TO STAY TOPICAL ("HIPPIE'S PLAYGROUND" CAME OUT IN '69), BUT HE COULDN'T PREVENT HIS ALREADY ANTIQUE BRAND OF BLUES FROM GOING OUT OF STYLE IN THE USA. IN '81 HE MOVED TO WINDSOR, ONTARIO, AND IN THE EARLY 90S HE RECORDED TWO ALBUMS IN THE UK FOR BULLSEYE BLUES. BUTLER'S LAST RECORD WAS 2003'S "SHO' NUFF," AND HE DIED FROM A PULMONARY EMBOLISM ON MARCH 2, 2005. - THANKS TO JOSE BERNAL

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black metal—it's an exhilarating call to run with the wolves, quaff mead, and ride ships to new worlds. —NOAH BERLATSKY

WEDNESDAY22

SHADOW OF INTENT *Inferi, Signs of the*

Swarm, Brand of Sacrifice, and Portals open. 6:30 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 2105 S. State, \$18, \$16 in advance. 17+

New England deathcore quartet Shadow of Intent have a pretty cool gimmick I wouldn't mind seeing more often: they like to release instrumental versions of their music. In 2017 they released *The Instrumentals*, a compilation of songs from ➔



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JANUARY 31	ALISON GROSS
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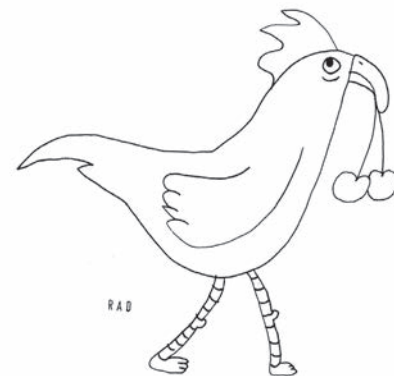
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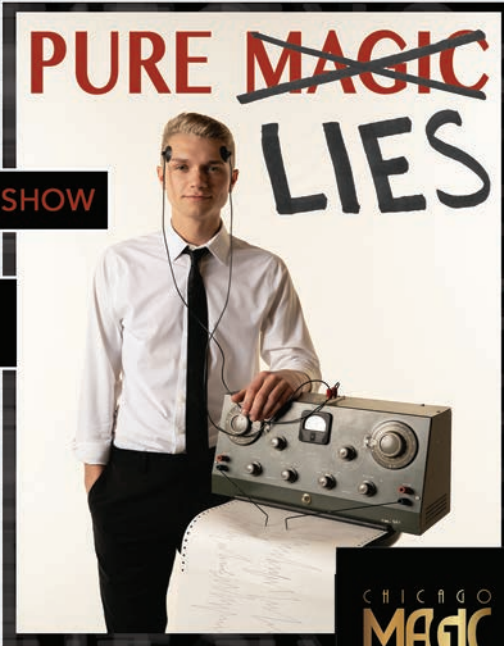
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their two previous full-lengths, *Primordial* and *Reclaimer*, with the vocal tracks removed. Their new full-length, *Melancholy*, a loose concept album about a cruel cult that follows a ghostly protagonist who's sacrificed to a death goddess in the opening track, is available both with and without vocals. The instrumental version of *Melancholy* shows off Shadow of Intent's growth over their four albums (counting the compilation) with its symphonic and technical flourishes, and it stands on its own as a solid listen rather than coming across as incomplete. Though it's clear where the vocals are meant to be, which might tempt you to sing along, these are hardly songs for karaoke night—you'd be hard pressed to live up to multifarious front man Ben Duerr, who wrings all the gruesome nuance out of the album's narrative with his powerhouse presence, grueling gutturals, and tortured high notes. Shadow of Intent were originally a studio-only project, but the addition of bassist Andrew Monias and drummer Anthony Barone in 2018 enabled them to tour. This show is part of their first headlining run. —MONICA KENDRICK

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GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

IF YOU'RE a Chicago record hound, you've probably bought an LP from **Jim Magas**: in the early 2000s he co-owned **Weekend Records & Soap**, and for the past 15 years he's been slinging wax at the Wicker Park **Reckless Records**. But late last month, Magas announced that he's leaving the record-store life—his last day at Reckless is Saturday, January 18. "I've absolutely loved all my years behind the counter, but I feel like I've got a lot of potential and want to challenge myself in new ways," Magas says. He's also a fixture on the midwestern experimental scene, and he owns the label **Midwich Productions**—pursuits he'd like to devote more of himself to. "Creatively, I feel like I'm firing on all cylinders, and I want to see where that energy takes me. I just want total freedom to pursue what life has to offer." His first album as **James Marlon Magas** drops via Midwich in the spring.

Chicago fourth-wave emo four-piece **Kittyhawk** haven't played a show since June 2016, but that's about to change! At the end of the month, they're heading to Japan for a brief tour, and they've added a new member, bassist **Clare Teeling**. But they'll play one gig for locals before they head east. On Saturday, January 18, they headline an **all-ages DIY show**; e-mail kittyhawkisaband@gmail.com for details.

It's hard to believe it's been only 18 months since Chicago producer and multi-instrumentalist **Dan Jogle** died in June 2018—his much-missed talents shone in such varied projects as electronic combos **Dar Embarks** and **Ghost Arcade** and indie-rock group **Chandeliers**. On Monday, January 20, dance label **Clear** (cofounded by local DJ **MTZ**) releases a four-song 12-inch from **Juzer**, Jogle's duo with fellow club-music innovator **Beau Wanzer**, that's stuffed with slashing EBM clatter and high-energy alien funk. Hypnotic acid-tinged jam "September" elicits the clammy feel of a claustrophobically crowded dance floor right at the peak of the party. —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip_Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

WOLF BY KEITH HERZIK

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Alison Balsom 1/25, 7:30 PM, Harris Theater
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Big League Boys 2/1, 9 PM, GMan Tavern
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Jenna Boyles, Erica Gressman 2/7, 7:30 PM, Experimental Sound Studio
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Brit Floyd 3/28, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM
Ally Brooke 3/6, 8 PM, House of Blues, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM
Burr Oak, Mia Joy, Kirby Grip 2/5, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Toranzo Cannon 3/13, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 1/17, 11 AM
Carnival featuring Chicago Samba Band, DJ Nogueira, and more 2/22, 9 PM, Logan Square Auditorium

Devin Clara's Bat Hawk, Brian Seyler Quartet 4/15, 9 PM, Hungry Brain
Davefest featuring Natalie Grace Alford, DJ Sammy Arechar 2/16, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
Darkness, Dead Deads 5/23, 8 PM, Park West, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM, 18+
J. Davis Trio, Prismatix 1/25, 8 PM, Chop Shop, 18+
Dirty Knobs with Mike Campbell 3/11, 8 PM, Park West, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM, 18+
Doomsquad, Radiant Devices, Magin 3/2, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle **FREE**
Eden, Keshi, Mackandgold 5/22, 8 PM, House of Blues, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM
Einstürzende Neubauten 10/23, 7:30 PM, The Vic, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM, 18+
El Gato Roboto, Dry Look 3/14, 9 PM, Liar's Club
Amir Elsaif and Two Rivers Ensemble 1/31, 6 PM, Harris Theater
Emo Night Brooklyn 2/7, 10 PM, Metro, 18+
Alejandro Escovedo with Antonio Gramentieri & Alex Ruiz 3/18-3/19, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 1/17, noon
Ex Okays 1/27, 8 PM, Schubas **FREE**
Fighting for Scraps, Squared Off 1/25, 9 PM, Liar's Club
Foreigner, Kansas, Europe 7/31, 7 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM
Funkadesi 2/1, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
Glitch Mob 4/17, 9 PM, Concord Music Hall, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM, 18+
Anthony Gomes 2/28, 7 PM, Reggie's Music Joint
Jacques Greene 3/14, 9 PM, Sleeping Village

Chris Greene Quartet 3/1, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM
Griselda 2/28, 8 PM, Patio Theater A
Halfloves, Dead Licks 1/29, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+
Halsey, Chvrches, Omar Apollo 6/27, 7 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM
Scott Henderson Trio, Chris Siebold Trio 1/31, 7:30 PM, Bananna's Comedy Shack at Reggie's
House of Bodhi featuring J. Ivy, Sam Trump 2/4, 7 PM, City Winery
Mike Huckaby, Justin Aulis Long, Grey People, Nishkosh 2/8, 10 PM, Smart Bar
Lyfe Jennings 4/3-4/4, 7 and 10 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 1/17, noon
Darius Jones/Josh Berman/Mike Reed 1/30, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+
Ladysmith Black Mambazo 3/8, 3 and 6 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, 6 PM sold out
Jeff Lescher with Green, Joy Poppers 3/7, 8 PM, GMan Tavern
Brandon Lopez/Dave Rempis/Weasel Walter, Ben Baker Billington/Mark Shippy/Dan Wyche/Andrew Scott Young, DJ Jake Lingan 1/31, 9 PM, Cafe Mustache
Low Down Brass Band, Mating, Wild Jesus & the Devil's Lettuce, Cocoa Greene, Dark Matter Coffee DJs 2/10, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle **FREE**
Luttrell 4/24, 9 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+
DJ Maseo of De La Soul, Shazam Bangles 1/24, 9 PM, Empty Bottle
Matchbox Twenty, Wallflowers 8/21, 7:30 PM, Hollywood Casi-

no Amphitheatre, Tinley Park, on sale Fri 1/17, noon A
Kiyoe Matsuura & Sun Chang 1/24, 7 PM, PianoForte Studios
John McCutcheon 4/18, 5 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Microwave, Elder Brother, Save Face, Dogleg 3/20, 7 PM, Bottom Lounge, on sale Fri 1/17, noon
Midnight Memories: One Direction Night (tribute dance party) 2/21, 9 PM, House of Blues, 17+
Ministry, KMFDM, Front Line Assembly 7/11, 7 PM, Riviera Theatre, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM, 18+
Monsta X 6/16, 7:30 PM, United Center, on sale Fri 1/17, 3 PM
Nacrobats 1/30, 9 PM, Emporium Wicker Park **FREE**
Haru Nemuri 3/25, 9 PM, Sleeping Village
Carrie Newcomer 4/3, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
On the Cinder, Butchered 2/17, 8 PM, Liar's Club
Origami Button, Authentic Pines 1/24, 7 PM, Chop Shop, 18+
Frank Orrall 3/14, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM
Graham Parker 4/10, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music, on sale Fri 1/17, 9 AM
Junius Paul/Corey Wilkes/Justin Dilliard/Vincent Davis 1/24, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+
Pigeons Playing Ping Pong, Goose 3/7, 8:45 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+
Pig's Blood, Hammr 1/31, 8 PM, Liar's Club
Jeremy Pinnell 3/19, 8:30 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn, on sale Fri 1/17, 11 AM
Prostitutes, Replicant, Hot Piss, JS Alvarez 2/20, 10 PM, Smart Bar **FREE**
R&B Only with Dauché and Jabari 2/14, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall
Radkey 2/15, 6:30 PM, Cobra Lounge
Tyler Ramsey 3/11, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston
Robert Randolph & the Family Band 2/6, 6:30 and 9:30 PM, City Winery
RAW Chicago presents Premiere featuring DJ Saccs 2/12, 7 PM, Metro
Tomeka Reid & Mike Reed and guests 2/2, 9 PM, Hungry Brain
Todd Rundgren 5/10-5/11, 8 PM, Athenaeum Theatre, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM
Shaq's Bass All-Stars featuring Diesel (Shaquille O'Neal), Waka Flocka Flame, Saymyname, Dee Mash 2/15, 9 PM,

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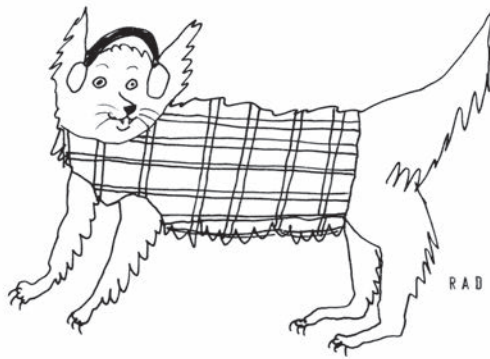
Concord Music Hall, 18+
Sheila E. 4/12-4/13, 8 PM, City Winery, on sale Fri 1/17, noon
Soul Queen! featuring Derrick Carter, Michael Serafini, Garrett David 1/26, 10 PM, Metro, hosted by Lucy Stoolie, JoJo Baby, Nico, Kandy Muse, and Miss Toto
Soundtrack series featuring Jared Brown 1/31, 6 PM, Museum of Contemporary Art
Stan Kenton Legacy Orchestra 4/21, 7 PM, FitzGerald's, Berwyn
The Tenth Annual Chili-Synth Cookoff featuring Whitney Johnson, Cooper Crain, Alex Ingilizian, Tom Owen 2/9, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle
This Must be the Band 3/14, 8 PM, Riviera Theatre, on sale Fri 1/17, 10 AM, 18+
Turtle Bugg, Robot Man Machine, Please, Sparkletone 2/29, 10 PM, Smart Bar
University of Chicago Folk Festival 2/14, 8 PM; 2/15, 7:30 PM, Mandel Hall, University of Chicago
Jake Wark (solo), Gerrit Hatcher Group 1/30, 9 PM, Elastic
Cheryl Wheeler 2/23, 7 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music
Billy Woods, Serengeti, Free Snacks 2/5, 9 PM, Subterranean
Eric Wubbels 1/23, 8 PM, Experimental Sound Studio A
Zhou Family Band 2/5, 8:30 PM, Szold Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music **FREE**

UPDATED

Dumbo Gets Mad, Sea Moya 3/5, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, rescheduled from 10/23/19

UPCOMING

Bailen, Old Sea Brigade 1/24-1/25, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+
Robert Hood, Lowki, Cinna 1/24, 10 PM, Metro
Kilt Karter, Ju Jilla, Jaas 1/23, 8:30 PM, Subterranean
Red Death, Enforced, Another One Dead, Millions of Dead Angels, Bovice 1/26, 7 PM, Cobra Lounge, 17+
Trampa, Figure, Phiso 1/24,



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OPINION



SAVAGE LOVE

Joyful consensual kink vs. self-harm

Plus, if you're frustrated by a sexual dry spell, maybe it's time for therapy.

By **DAN SAVAGE**

Q: I'm a 26-year-old bisexual woman with a history of self-harm. It hasn't been much of an issue for the last few years, but my sex life has improved a lot in that time. I realized that I am quite submissive and masochistic, and I have found a wonderful Dominant partner who I've gotten to explore that kink with in a positive and healthy way. Last night, I watched the movie *Secretary*, and Maggie Gyllenhaal's character is someone who self-harms but stops when she begins a Dom/sub relationship with her boss. Obviously this film is flawed and not exactly a great guideline for healthy BDSM relationships. (The power dynamic! The lack of consent! That weird come scene!) However, I did find myself relating to her character and am now questioning my motives for pursuing this kind of sexual relationship. I worry that I may be unintentionally using the pain that I lovingly experience from my partner as a replacement for the

pain I used to experience from my bad habits. Or am I using BDSM as a form of harm reduction? Is it rational to even compare these two things? —**SEEKING CAREFUL ADVICE REGARDING RECENT EMOTIONAL DISCOVERY**

A: "I completely get where SCARRED is coming from," said Lina Dune, the creator of Ask a Sub (askasub.com). "You're discovering your kinks, and then the culture comes in with a not-entirely-accurate film or hot take, and it can taint your self-discovery."

Dune is known as a "fairy submother" to her thousands of followers on Instagram, where she regularly posts about the D/s lifestyle and frequently highlights red flags that newbies to the kink scene may miss. (A Dom who insists he "doesn't negotiate" with subs? Run away.) While still relatively young herself, Dune has been active in the kink scene for many years and identifies as a 24/7 lifestyle sub.

"There's a difference

between self-harm and what SCARRED is doing with her Dom in a consensual, rational, measured environment with safe words in place," said Dune. "And it's telling that she didn't write in to say, 'Oh my god, I'm using D/s to self-harm!' Rather, she's worried she might be unintentionally or unknowingly engaging in some form of self-harm."

While the fictional character played by Maggie Gyllenhaal stops engaging in acts of self-harm after entering into a D/s relationship with the fictional character played by James Spader, SCARRED, you don't want to overinterpret that fictional narrative. Meaning, while the film suggested there was causal relationship between Gyllenhaal's character entering into a D/s relationship and no longer engaging in acts of self-harm, that doesn't mean the same is true for you.

"The culture infantilizes us all when it comes to owning our sexual desires—and that's especially the case for women," said Dune. "The mes-

NIU NIU VIA UNSPLASH

sage is: 'You don't know what you're getting into' or 'You don't realize the effect this is having.' But if there's one thing SCARRED is an expert on, it's herself. It's not like she's in a trance when she's with her Dom—no matter what the movies want us to believe about D/s relationships—which means she's consciously choosing this for herself, and it feels healthy and good. Our bodies don't usually lie, and I'd be willing to bet that self-harm did not feel that way."

But even if it turns out you're right—even if, worst-case scenario, joyful consensual kink in the context of an intimate connection with another person is somehow a replacement for solo acts of self-harm that isolated you—it could still be a good thing.

Dune suggests that you explore your feelings with a kink-positive therapist, and I want to second that. “From my perspective, it looks like SCARRED may have been manufacturing her own version of exposure therapy, which some somatic-based psychologists have suggested is exactly what negotiated, consent-based kink play can provide,” said Dune. “For example, a person with a fear of being powerless may find it helpful to experiment with powerlessness in small, controlled doses in the context of a structured, negotiated BDSM situation. Looking a fear in the eye and then being able to back away from it at will and end with a cuddle and a check-in with your play partner can make you feel more powerful, not less. So if SCARRED can consciously work through this with a therapist and her Dom, this BDSM relationship has the potential to be very healing, just as long as she maintains her autonomy within it.”

Q: I'm a 26-year-old straight man, and I haven't gotten laid

in a while. I never actually got much to begin with. I lost my virginity late (age 23, also my first kiss) and had bottled up quite a bit of frustration until then (still got a lot of that left over). I also suffer from crippling social anxiety—so crippling, in fact, that I can't even get to know people online, which rules out online dating. I have recently come to the realization that the only way for me to ever get better is to stop wanting to get laid so much. Which. Is. Hard. The first step is learning to be okay with things as they are, which I am making progress with. But sex is everywhere: TV, movies, magazines. On the few occasions I do get to spend time with people, sex comes up a lot. People seriously complain to me about not having "gotten any" for two months, and that's not enough for them. I've heard people describe themselves as "late bloomers" because they had their first time at 17 or 19. I feel like such a freak. I have a male roommate who frequently has women over. I hear them going at it through the wall and get panic attacks because of it. I need some advice on how to be okay with not getting any, not really having gotten much to begin with, and just generally being nervous and inexperienced and self-conscious and lonely. I know that's a lot, but perhaps you have some valuable thoughts for me. —AFTER-SCHOOL SPECIAL

A: Since there's no way to strip the sex scenes and sexual references from every TV show you watch, magazine you read, or conversation you have, ASS, working on yourself is going to be a far better use of your time than demanding a remade/desexed world. And by

“working on yourself,” of course I mean “getting your ass into therapy.” Whether or not you ever get laid again, getting professional help to address your frustrations and social anxiety is going to improve your life. (It will up the chances that you'll get laid again, ASS, but no promises.)

And take heart: For every letter like yours I get from a straight guy, ASS, I get an identical letter from a straight woman. Which means there are a lot of women out there who are just as inexperienced, self-conscious, and lonely. Once you're in good working order—not perfect, just functional—you might be able to connect with one of those women or some other woman. (But no one wants to connect with a guy who gives off a ragey vibe, so please stay away from incel forums.)

And your inexperience makes you less freakish these days than you seem to realize. While 54 percent of high-school students had had sex by age 18 in 1991, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, today only 41 percent of high-school students have had sex by age 18. Which means there are a lot of "late bloomers" out there, ASS. And while you've doubtless heard that confidence is attractive, you most likely haven't been told that a person doesn't have to be experienced to be confident. A guy just has to be comfortable enough in his own skin to be open about who he is, where he's at, and what he's looking for.

But first things first: Get yourself a good therapist . . . and maybe a pair of noise-canceling headphones. **R**

Send letters to mail@savagelove.net. Download the Savage Lovecast every Tuesday at savagelovecast.com

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Dissolution in connection
with its liquidation and
dissolution. Any claim
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the substance of the stated
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commenced within sixty
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of this notice. The Company
maintains the authority and
right to make distributions
to other claimants, the
Company's stockholders, or
other persons.

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relation to the use of an
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the conduct or transaction
of Business in the State," as
amended, that a certification
was registered with the County
Clerk of Cook County.
Registration Number:
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26, 2019. Under the
Assumed Business Name of
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business located at 1100
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615, Chicago, IL 60610.

**STATE OF ILLINOIS,
PUBLICATION NOTICE
OF COURT DATE FOR
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CHANGE.** Location Cook
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Case Type: Name Change
from CHERYL MARIE
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marie Court Date March
03, 2020, 9:30 AM in
Courtroom #1707 Case #
2020CONC000008

**STATE OF ILLINOIS,
PUBLICATION NOTICE
OF COURT DATE FOR
REQUEST FOR NAME
CHANGE.** Location Cook
County - County Division -
Case Type: Name Change
from JEFFREY RAYNARD
SANDERS to sanders
jeffrey raynard Court Date
March 11, 2020, 9:30 AM
in Courtroom #1706 Case #
2020CONC000029

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Registration Number:
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and residence address of the
owner(s)/partner(s) is: JAMIE
A. KURZMAN 21 E. HURON,
#2002 CHICAGO, IL 60611,
USA.

This letter is to notify that
on January 25, 2020 at
9:00 a.m. an auction will
be held at 83rd & Halsted
Self Storage, Inc., located
at 8316 S. Birkhoff Ave,
Chicago, IL 60620, to sell
the following articles held
within said storage units
to enforce a lien existing
under the laws of the state
of Illinois.

1. 199 Jade McCray
2. 459 Michelle Camphor
3. 329 Stanley Matthews
4. 125 Stanley Matthews
5. 140 Kristen Blackman
6. 320 Stanley Matthews
7. 250 Carl Childress
8. 210 Gerald Warren
9. 246 Oprah Lindsey
10. 206 Katrina Lee
11. 498 Willie Smith

This letter is to notify that
on January 25, 2020 at
9:00 a.m. an auction will
be held at Hyde Park Self
Storage, Inc., located at
5155 S. Cottage Grove
Ave, Chicago, IL 60615, to
sell the following articles
held within said storage
units to enforce a lien
existing under the laws of
the state of Illinois.

1. 565 Daniel Goldman
2. 493 Edward
Schmeltzer
3. 227 Robert W. Sales
4. 202A William Brown
5. 10176 Devra R.
Saunders
6. 490 Dorothy H.
Ragsdale
7. 10177 Kenneth
Williams
8. 52 Elaine T. Louis
9. 39 Theresa Thapedi

This letter is to notify that
on January 25, 2020 at
9:00 a.m. an auction will
be held at South Shore
Self Storage, Inc., located
at 7843 S. Exchange Ave,
Chicago, IL 60649, to
sell the following articles
held within said storage
units to enforce a lien
existing under the laws of
the state of Illinois.

1. 320 Balencia
Petty
2. 238 Lafayette Campbell
3. N008 Nicole Watson
4. 606 Diane Taylor
5. 461 Larissa Johnson
6. 302 Jamel Amos
7. 370 Chevelbia
Williams
8. 313 Donna Boyd
9. 568 William G.
Robinson
10. 374 Preston Phillips
11. 602 Gregory
Thomas
12. N010 William Slater
13. 605 Susan Clay

This letter is to notify that
on January 25, 2020 at
9:00 a.m. an auction will
be held at Aaron Bros.
Self-Storage, Inc., located
at 4034 S. Michigan Ave,
Chicago, IL 60653, to sell
the following articles held
within said storage units
to enforce a lien existing
under the laws of the state
of Illinois.

1. 345 Kermit Waddy
2. 121 Candee Henley
3. 566 Cassius Rudolph
4. 304 Dianna Murray
5. 229 Ishmael
McDaniels
6. 436 Charisma Ward
7. 2000 Nina Powell
8. 335 Diannah Minefee
9. 247 David Powell
10. 500 Michael Griffith
11. 228 Bethany
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12. 552 Michael Weston

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